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AN ICELAND FISHERMAN

Translated from the French of Pierre Loti

By H. A. MELCON

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AN ICELAND FISHERMAN.

From the French of PIERRE LOTI.

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AN ICELAND FISHERMAN.

PART FIRST.

CHAPTER I.

THERE were five of them, all broad-shouldered fellows, who, leaning on their elbows, sat drinking in a gloomy cell which smelled of brine and the sea. The room, too low for their height, grew narrower at the end, like the interior of a big sea-gull, and it slightly swung to and fro, giving out a monotonous groan with the languor of sleep.

Outside, to be sure, there was the sea and the night, but nobody seemed to be conscious of it. One single opening could be noticed in the ceiling that was covered by a wooden lid ; and it was by an old hanging lamp that the room received its flickering light. In the stove a good fire was burning and the vapor of their drenched clothings,

spread to be dried, filled the place, mingled with the smoke of their clay pipes.

A large table occupied most of the room, being exactly of the same shape; and there was hardly room enough to sit around it on the seats fastened to the oaken walls. The stout beams, extending obliquely from the sides of the cabin to the center of the ceiling, almost touched their heads. Behind their backs the berths, hollowed out to the full depth of the timber-work, had the appearance of so many niches in a cave ready to receive the dead. All the wainscoting was coarse and defaced, impregnated with dampness and salt, polished and shining by the rubbing of hands.

They had been drinking wine and cider; and already jollity and mirth was brightening their frank and free figures. Until now they sat quietly chatting, in the Breton vernacular, on questions touching women and marriage.

At the further end of the room, in a place of honor, there was a picture of the Holy Virgin in faïence put on a shelf against the panel. It was a little tarnished by age, and had been painted with a naïve art, this patron saint of the sea-

farers. But these creations of art, made in faïence, had the good fortune of preserving themselves much longer than flesh-formed beings. Her crimson and bluish robe had a good deal of freshness in contrast with the somber gray colorings of this wretched wooden house. She must have listened to many an ardent prayer in hours of anguish ; and surely some soul in distress must have decked her feet with those bouquets of artificial flowers and the rosary.

These five men were dressed alike. The upper part of their bodies was covered with a blue thickly-knitted woolen waistcoat, tucked in the pantaloons. Their head-gear was made of canvas saturated with oil which they called *suroît*, after the name of the Southwester which brings rain in its wake in these parts of the world.

They were of different ages. The captain must have been about forty, three others ranging from twenty-five to thirty. The fifth, whom they called Sylvestre or Lurlu, was hardly passed seventeen, but he had grown to the strength and the height of a man. His face was covered with a very fine and black curly beard ; yet his grayish

blue eyes had kept the mellow and sweet expression of childhood. Crowded near each other, for lack of room, they seemed to pass a real jolly good time, housed in their anything but bright home.

Outside there were, to be sure, the sea and the night, the infinite waste of black deep waters. A copper clock hanging from the wall showed the hour of eleven, undoubtedly eleven o'clock in the night. The rain could be heard beating on the wooden roof overhead.

They gaily discussed questions of marriage without letting out any word not modest. No, their talk was only about plans of the unmarried, and about droll events that had occurred during the wedding season. Occasionally they made a hint, perhaps a little too frank, on the delights of love. But love as understood by people of this stamp is always something wholesome ; and even in its crude state, it remains well-nigh chaste.

During all this time Sylvestre was fretting about the non-appearance of Jean (a name pronounced Yann by the Bretons).

But let us ask where was this Yann? always at work on deck? Why did he not come down to take part in the festivity?

"Almost midnight!" said the captain, and standing up erect, he lifted up with his head the wooden cover in the ceiling to call out to Yann. And then a ghastly gleam of light fell in the cabin from above.

"Yann! Yann! . . . You, *man!*"

And the *man* answered roughly from outside. The pale gleam that crawled in through this half-open lid was very much like daylight.—"Almost midnight." . . . Yet it was a good deal like the glimmer of the sun, like the corpuscular glimmer reflected from afar by mysterious mirrors. As soon as the opening was closed, darkness returned and the little hanging lamp emitted a yellowish shimmer; and the man could be heard descending noisily with his heavy shoes down the wooden steps. While entering he was obliged to double up like a big bear, for he was almost a giant. From the very first, he made a grimace, pinching the end of his nose on account of the sharp odor of the brine. He

exceeded ordinary persons a little too much in bodily dimensions, especially in the shoulders, straight as a bar. When seen from the front the muscles of his shoulders projected from under his blue waistcoat and looked like a pair of balls at the upper end of his arms. He had large brown liquid eyes with a savage and a haughty expression.

Sylvestre, passing his arms around Yann's waist, drew him with tenderness towards himself much the same way that children do. He was betrothed to Yann's sister and considered him a big brother. While the other let himself be caressed like an indolent lion, responding with a sweet smile, showing his white teeth. The latter, having much more space to grow than those of average persons, were set far apart and looked much smaller than they really were. His blonde mustaches grew quite short, though never trimmed. They were curled into two symmetrical rolls above his lips, that had an exquisitely fine contour. And then they were frizzed into two points in both corners of his mouth. The rest of his beard was clipped very close; and his rosy

cheeks had preserved their velvety smoothness like a fruit not yet handled.

They again filled their glasses while Yann took a seat ; and to relight their pipes they called the cabin boy. This part of the boy's duty gave him the chance of having a bit of a smoke himself. He was a robust fellow with a round figure, sort of a cousin to most of the sailors, who were more or less related to each other. Outside of the hard work assigned to him he was the spoiled child on board. Yann made him drink out of his own glass and then sent him to sleep.

Upon this they took up again their quite important conversation on the marital question.

"Yann," demanded Sylvestre, "when shall we celebrate your wedding ?"

"Aren't you ashamed," said the captain, "a grown-up man like you not married yet at the age of twenty-seven ? What the girls must think about you when they meet you !"

He shrugged his massive shoulders with a disdainful movement not calculated to flatter the fair sex.

This Yann had seen five years' service in the

Navy; and it was there that, as gunner in the fleet, he had learned to speak French and hold skeptical views. Soon he began to tell about his last marital adventure, that seemed to have lasted only a fortnight. This was in Nantes, with a singer. On an evening, just back from the sea, he had entered an Alcazar his head a little tipsy. There was a woman at the entrance selling enormous bouquets, at twenty francs apiece. He had bought one without knowing what to do with it. The minute he entered the hall, he flung it with the whole of his strength straight to the person singing, at the time, on the stage, which was meant as a half declaration and half scorn for that painted puppet whom he found a trifle too rosy. The woman tottered and fell from the shock. . . . Afterwards she came to adore him for the period of three weeks.

"She herself when we parted made a present of this gold watch to me;" and to let them have a look at it, he threw it down on the table as a contemptible toy.

This story was told with rough words and original metaphors. With these primitive men

the vulgarity of civilized life was sorely out of tune, while the solemn stillness of the ocean was felt all around, while peeped from above a glimpse of the midnight light which carried with it the nation of dying summers in the polar expanses.

Yann's way of talking gave pain to Sylvestre and took him by surprise. He was an innocent child, taught to respect by his old grandma the widow of a fisherman from the village of Ploubazlanec. When a mere child he was wont to go with her to his mother's grave, and kneeling there tell his beads. From the graveyard among the rocks there could be seen far away the dark billows of the Manche, where his father had found a watery grave in a shipwreck. Being poor he was obliged from his earliest youth to go out fishing with his grandmother; and thus passed his youth mostly on the waters. It was his custom to tell every night his prayers; and in his eyes shone a religious simplicity. He was handsome, and next to Yann carried on him the best appearance of any on board. As he had grown up all too sudden, he was rather embarrassed at finding himself all at once so big. He

expected to marry Yann's sister very soon; so he had never encouraged the advances of any other girl.

There were only three berths on board the vessel, where they slept by turns.

It was a little after midnight when they finished the festivities celebrated in honor of the Assumption of the Holy Virgin. Three of them crept in to sleep in their narrow, darksome bunks, which were very much like so many sepulchers. While the other three crossed the bridge to take up again the interrupted work of fishing. These three were Yann, Sylvestre, and one of their countrymen, called Guillaume.

Outside it was daylight, eternal daylight. But only a pale wan light, very strange in other latitudes. It lingered on every object like the dying rays of the setting sun.

All of a sudden an immense void stretched all around of no particular color. Beyond the planks of the ship everything seemed transparent, impalpable and fantastic. The eye could hardly catch the outlines of the sea. At first it appeared like a shaking mirror which had no im-

age to reflect. In the far-off distance it seemed to be transfigured to a plain of vapor; and further out still nothing at all, no outline! no horizon!

The fresh humidity of the air was more intense, more chilling than the real cold; and the pungent smell of salt was felt when breathing.

It was now very calm and had stopped raining. Up above in the sky clouds without shape and color seemed to hold back the luminary that failed to put in an appearance. Things could be seen clearly and yet carried with them the consciousness of night. It was quite impossible to name the shapes and colorings of objects thus infused with this strange paleness.

These three, now keeping watch, had lived from boyhood on this icy sea, in the midst of illusive phantasms that were vague and turbid like visions. They were accustomed to see all these infinite mutations play around their house of planks; and their eyes were grown as piercing as those of the fowls of the ocean.

The vessel swung slowly on her moorings, giving out always the same monotonous, plaintive

note like a song of Brittany hummed in dream by a man in slumber.

Yann and Sylvestre had made ready their lines and hooks, while their companion opened the barrel of salt, and, sharpening his knife, sat awaiting. He did not have to wait very long.

They had hardly flung their lines into the tranquil and icy waters when they pulled them out all too heavy with gray fish sparkling like steel. Over and over again they caught the cod-fish. This silent work was going on without pause and intermission. In the meanwhile Guillaume was opening them up with his big knife, then, flattening them out, salted and counted them. And the pickle, which was to make their fortune on their return, was heaped in piles behind them, all dripping and fresh.

The monotonous hours glided along, and far out in the wide expanses the light was gradually changing. It looked like something real now. What had been a pale twilight, a sort of hyperborean summer evening, without passing through the intermediate state of a night, was now reflected in rose-colored paths by all the mirrors of the sea.

"I am sure you ought to get married, Yann," said Sylvestre with great seriousness looking into the water. He had the air of one who seemed to know that some one in Brittany had been enslaved by the brown eyes of this his big brother. But he felt timid to touch on this grave subject.

"O yes! One of these days I shall get married," and at this Yann, always with a contemptuous smile, rolled his lively eyes, "but with none of the children of the soil. No, my nuptials will be with the sea; and I invite you all, all of you, to the ball that I intend giving."

They went on with their fishing, for they could not spend time in talk. They were in the midst of an immense shoal of fish, a migrating band, which had been passing since two days without their end having come yet.

They had stayed out all the previous night, catching in thirty hours over a thousand big cod-fish. As a result of this hard work their arms were benumbed and they fell asleep.

Only their bodies kept the night watch, and they continued to fish without any effort of the will, while their minds floated away in deep sleep.

The air of the open sea which they breathed was just as pure now as on the first days of the world's birth ; it was so vivifying that, in spite of their fatigue, they felt their lungs dilate and their cheeks flush.

The morning light, the real light, put in an appearance at last. As in the days of the Genesis they were separated from darkness which seemed to grow in files over the horizon and there stood heaped in heavy masses.

Now that they could see objects clearly they felt they were emerging from the long night ; that the glimmer about them was as vague and strange as a dream.

The sky, covered all over with low-hanging clouds, was here and there rent in fissures like the cracks in a dome, through which pierced silver rays tinged with rose. The lower clouds, inclined to form dark, heavy layers, were marching the round of the waters, enclosing the far distance in obscurity and vagueness. They gave the illusions of an encompassed space with a limit. They were like veils drawn over the infinite, or like curtains lowered down to hide from view the

gigantic mysteries that vex the human imagination.

That same morning, around the small assemblage of planks that carried on them Yann and Sylvestre, the changing world outside had assumed the appearance of an immense devotion. It was arrayed like a sanctuary, and sheaves of light found entrance through the rents of that vaulted temple and suffused their reflections over the stagnant waters, as on a marble floor. And soon another chimera could be discerned far away, little by little, a sort of a high rose-colored promontory which was a cape of gloomy Iceland.

The marriage of Yann with the Sea! . . . Sylvestre pondered about it, still going on with the fishing, not daring to speak out a word. He felt very sad hearing his big brother speak so mockingly about the Sacrament of Marriage. Moreover, it frightened him, because he was superstitious. For a long time he had been musing about this wedding of Yann. He had been dreaming that he would marry with Gaud Mavel, a blonde of Paimpol; and that he himself would have the happiness of witnessing this marriage

celebrated before his start for the five years' military service, his return from which being uncertain; and whose inevitable approach filled his heart with dismay.

Four o'clock in the morning. The other three sleeping below came up to relieve them. Not quite awake yet, they filled their lungs with the crisp cold air, and while climbing up the stairs, they finished tying their boots. At first they even shut their eyes, that pale light being too dazzling.

Yann and Sylvestre made a hasty breakfast of biscuits, after cracking them with a mallet and crunching them up, laughing for finding them so hard. They were greatly delighted with the idea of going to rest and warm themselves up in their cribs. Holding each other around the waist they proceeded as far as the hatchway, waddling to the tune of an old song. Before disappearing down through the opening they stopped for a minute to play with Turc, a young Newfoundland, the pet of the vessel, with enormous paws, very awkward and still kittenish. They provoked him, and he, turning, bit them like a wolf;

and ended by hurting them. Then Yann with a sudden burst of passion burning in his eyes, repulsed him with a hard blow that stunned him to the ground.

Yann had a good heart, but there still remained in him something of the savage. And when his physical nature was at full play, even his sweet caress was much akin to the brutal.

CHAPTER II.

THE name of the vessel was *Marie*, Captain Guermeur. Every year she went on a great fishing expedition to these cold regions, where the sun never sets in the summer. Like her patron saint, the Virgin in faïence, she was very ancient. Her massive sides, with oaken ribs, were defaced, shrunk, and impregnated with humidity and brine ; but still weatherproof and strong, exhaling a vivifying smell of tar. While anchored she had a cumbersome appearance with her bulky timber-work. But when strong westerly gales were blowing she had her nimble vigor restored to her like the sea-gull roused by the wind. She had a whim of her own to lift herself on the billows and take a bound over the watery plain much more nimbly than many a craft of newer construction and finer design.

As for the crew—six men and the cabin-boy—they were Icelanders—a valiant race of sailors

scattered over Paimpol and Treguier devoting their lives from father to son to fishing.

They had never seen summer in France. At the end of every winter they received, together with other fishermen, the parting benediction at the port of Paimpol.

For this fête day they raised always the same altar on the quay. It looked like a grotto among rocks. In the center, among trophies of anchors, oars, and nets there stood enthroned the sweet and impassive patron Saint of sailors, the Virgin, who took a walk out of the church, from generation to generation to gaze with the same lifeless eyes upon the lucky ones to whom the season was to bring good fortune ; and on others who were to return no more !

The Holy Sacrament, followed by a slow procession of wives and mothers, fiancées and sisters, made the round of the harbor, where all the vessels bound for Iceland, were decked with flags which were lowered as it passed. The priest stopping before each vessel delivered the words, and made the sign of benediction. At last they all sailed, a small flotilla, leaving behind a country

almost empty of husbands, lovers, and sons. As it glided away the crews sang together, in full-throated voice, the canticles of Marie, Star-of-the-Sea.

And every year the same ceremony of parting and the same adieux!

Then began life on the water, the isolation of three or four rough comrades on a few moving planks in the midst of chilling waters of the hyperborean sea.

Up to this time they had always returned to the shores,—the Virgin Star-of-the-Sea having taken under her protection this vessel, the *Marie*, her namesake.

The last of August was the time to get back. But the *Marie* was following the custom of many Icelanders, which was to touch only at Paimpol, and, afterwards, make her way down the Gulf of Gascony, where they could get good prices for their fish, and through the sandy islands of salt marshes, where they could buy salt for their next voyage. These hardy sailors lingered for a few days in the still warm southern ports, eager after pleasure, getting intoxicated by this bit of

summer, by this almost too tepid atmosphere, by the smell of earth, and by women.

With the first fogs of autumn they returned to their firesides in Paimpol, or to the scattered huts of the Goëlo district, to devote themselves for some time to their families and sweethearts, to weddings and births. Almost always they found new-born babies at home, conceived during the winter who waited for godfathers to receive the baptismal sacrament.

This race of fishermen had need of many infants to fill the place of those devoured by Iceland.

CHAPTER III.

In Paimpol, on a fine Sunday evening of May in the same year, two women were busy writing a letter. They were sitting near a large open window, on whose massive marble sill flower-pots were ranged in a row. Their heads bent on the table; both looked quite young. One of them wore an old-fashioned large head-dress, while the other had a much smaller one, after the latest Paimpolese fashion. One might take them for two lovers wording a fond message for their Icelander beaux.

She of the big head-dress, who was dictating, lifted her head as if in search of some idea. Look! she was old, very old, inspite of her youthful appearance, seen from the back, covered with a small brown shawl. Nevertheless, she was quite old, a good-natured Grandma, over seventy. Still, she looked very pretty, very fresh, with her rosy cheeks, like some old persons, who have the gift of preserving long their charms.

Her head-dress, very low on her forehead and on top of her head, was composed of two or three muslin cornets which, getting apart from each other, fell loose over her head. All these white folds took on a religious air, when encircling a venerable face like hers. Her eyes, so sweet, were full of kindly expressions. She had no teeth, none at all, but in their place when she laughed, her round gums could be seen, just like those of a baby. Her prominent chin looked "like the point of a wooden shoe"; but her profile was none the worse for her old age. It was not hard to guess that when young she must have had pure regular features, like the saints seen in churches.

She looked out of the window to see if she could think of anything else amusing to write to her son. In fact there could not be found anywhere in Paimpol her equal in picking up comical anecdotes about this person or that, or about nothing at all. In this letter she had already told three or four funny stories, meaning no malice, for she had nothing wicked in her mind.

The young woman, seeing that more matter for

the letter was slow in coming, started to write carefully the address :—

To Monsieur Moan, Sylvestre, on board the *Marie*, Captain Guermeur,—in the Iceland Sea, near Reickawick.

Then she also lifted up her head and asked,

"Is this all, Grandma Moan?"

She was very young, charmingly young, a lass of twenty. She had the fair complexion of a blonde—something rare in this nook of Brittany where the race is dark—a blonde with hazel eyes and eyelashes almost black. Her eyebrows, light as her hair, seemed to be repainted a shade deeper and darker, and gave her an expression of vigor and will. Her profile, rather short, was noble, her forehead being continued with an absolutely straight line to the end of her nose, like those chiseled in Grecian art. The deep dimple below her lower lip accentuated its curve, and when, from time to time, she was absorbed in some deep thought, she would bite this curly lip with her upper white teeth, printing in crimson her delicate skin.

In her slim figure there was something grave

and haughty, that showed the blood of her hardy Iceland ancestors. She had the expression of eyes, at once obstinate and gentle.

Her head-dress had the form of a shell, coming down over her forehead, close as a band, and then turned up high on both sides, bringing to view thick braids of hair, coiled like a snail above her ears,—a style of head-dress handed down from olden times ; and now giving a fanciful appearance to the Paimpolese women.

Anybody could see that she was bred different from this poor old woman, whom, though she called Grandmother, was in fact only a distant relation, who had suffered a great deal.

This young girl was the daughter of M. Mével, an old Icelander, a half pirate, enriched by bold adventures on the seas.

The snug room, where they had written the letter, belonged to her. On one side there was a new bed with muslin curtains bordered with lace. A bright-colored paper attenuated the unevenness of the stone wall. The ceiling was whitewashed with a thick layer of lime, thus covering the enormous rafters that would have betrayed the old

age of the structure. Apparently this was the house of a well-to-do *bourgeois*. The windows looked over the quaint market-place of Paimpol, where were held fairs, and indulgences were distributed.

"Is this all, Grandma Yvonne? Haven't you anything else to write?"

"No, my child, only I wish you to add my kind greetings to Son Gaos."

Son Gaos! . . . otherwise called Yann . . . while writing this name the young ardent lass blushed in deep crimson.

The minute this was added with a flowing hand to the bottom of the page, she got up and turned her head towards the window, as if looking on something very interesting out in the square. Thus standing she had a noble figure. Her shape, in a close-fitting corsage, had the mold of a lady of fashion.

In spite of her quaint head-dress she carried on her the look of a lady, though her hands, lacking the traditional lily-fingers, were nevertheless delicate and white, never accustomed to hard, rough work.

It is true that when a child she had played all day long barefooted in the water, left alone, all to herself, her mother being dead and her father away to Iceland during the fishing season,—pretty, rosy, wilful and capricious, growing robust in the biting winds of the Manche. It was then that Grandma Moan took the little girl to her house, and when compelled to be absent from home in the busy season in Paimpol, she was given Sylvestre to take care of. Gaud had the adoration of a little mother for this other little one left to her care, being hardly eighteen months his senior. He was just as dark as she was fair, as quiet and submissive as she was wild and wayward. Not spoiled by wealth and city life, she recalled the earlier days of her childhood as a remote dream full of wild freedom, in a mysterious and indefinite epoch, when the beaches were surely more far-stretching, and the cliffs more gigantic.

When she was quite young, five or six years old, her father having made some money in buying and selling cargoes of vessels, took her with him, first to St. Brienc, and, later on, to Paris.

There little Gaud became Mademoiselle Marguerite, handsome, serious, and grave-looking. She had the obstinate nature of her infancy, being now also left to a freedom differing only in character from what she enjoyed on the beaches of Brittany.

Whatever ideas she had about life had come to her by mere chance without any voluntary effort; but an innate and excessive dignity had served her as a safeguard. From time to time, she put on a reckless gait, telling people, in the face, things too frank, which astounded them. Her beautiful bright glance never flinched before the gaze of young men; and that look was so innonocent and careless that it could not be misjudged by them; and they soon found out that they had to do with a girl as pure in heart, as she was perfect in figure. These big cities affected and changed more her costume than her nature. Although she had kept her head-dress, like all Breton women being unwilling to give it up, she soon learned to dress herself in the new city fashion, and the form of the little fisher-maid freely developed into fine contours in the sea-shore

breezes, was now clasped at the waist by the corsets of a *demoiselle*. Every year she came back to Brittany with her father—like the bathers only in the summer,—finding there again the memories of bygone days; and hearing herself once more addressed "Gaud," which was the Breton name for Marguerite. Perhaps she was a little curious to see those Iceland fishermen, so much talked about, whom she never saw there, and from whose number some yearly were found missing on their return. Everywhere she heard talk about this Iceland, which she imagined as a treacherous whirlpool; and whither had sailed now the one she loved. . . .

And one fine day she was brought back to live again with these fishermen, by the caprice of her father, who had felt the desire of passing his last days in Paimpol, like a *bourgeois*.

As soon as the letter was read over and the envelope sealed, the old poor woman, thanking the young girl, took her leave. She lived quite a distance away on the edge of the Ploubazlanec district, in a hut near the coast, just the same one where she was born, and where she had

reared her children and grandchildren. When passing through the town she answered to the greetings of many. She was one of the oldest persons in the neighborhood, the last of a family valiant, and esteemed by all. Through infinite care and painstaking she had a fairly good appearance, dressed in poor mended garments, which were giving out here and there. She always wore the same brown little Paimpolese shawl, over which, for sixty years, the muslin cornets of her big head-dress had fallen down—her own wedding-shawl, formerly blue, re-dyed on the occasion of her son Pierre's wedding, and still worn on Sundays, being quite presentable. In her walk she continued to keep erect, unlike most old people. In spite of her prominent chin with eyes so kindly, and with a profile so finely cut no one could help thinking her other than lovely. That she was much respected by everybody was evident from the manner of their greetings.

On her way she passed by the house of an old lover of hers,—an old aspirant of her hand, a carpenter by trade, an octogenarian who always

sat at the door while his sons were busy planing on the joiner's bench.

It was rumored that he was never consoled since her refusal of having him for a first or second husband. But with age this had turned into a half-malignant, comical grudge; and he alway questioned her.

"Eh, young beauty, when do you want your measure taken?"

She thanking him said she had decided not to have that costume made. The fact is, the old man, by that rather insipid pleasantry, was referring to the costume of boards,—the last of earthly attires.

"Well, any time you wish; but, my dear, don't inconvenience yourself, you know. . . . He had made this same jest many times before, but to-day she was hardly able to laugh at it, for she felt weary and tired out by her incessant life of toil. She was thinking of her grandson, her last, who, on his return from Iceland, had to start for service in the Navy.—Five years! . . . to be sent to China, perhaps to war! would she be living when he came back? An intense anguish

took hold of her at the thought. No, decidedly not. The outward gaiety of this poor woman belied her innermost feelings, and you could see, even now, this face contracted, ready to cry.

Then it was possible, it was true, that this last dear grandson of hers was going to be snatched away from her. Alas! to die forlorn, perhaps even before seeing him once more.

Through some influential personages in town she had already taken steps to prevent this sad parting, telling that, being indigent, and unable to work, she needed her son's help for her support. This had not succeeded on account of an elder brother, Jean Moan, who having deserted the army, was never mentioned in the family, and who lived somewhere in America, depriving his younger brother of the benefit of military exemption. Moreover, they had refused her request on account of the small pension she was getting as a sailor's widow. Evidently they did not find her poor enough.

When she reached home, she paused a long time in prayer for the souls of her dead sons and grandsons, and also she prayed for her little

Sylvestre, and then tried to sleep, but, unable, she thought about that "costume of boards"; and her heart was filled with dismay, finding herself so old at the moment of this parting. . . .

The young girl was still sitting by the window watching the yellow reflections of the setting sun on the stone walls, and the swallows circling about through the air. Paimpol was always very quiet, even on Sundays, in these long May evenings. Girls, who had nobody to court them, were promenading by twos and threes, dreaming about their sweethearts, now in far-away Iceland. . . .

"My kind greetings to Son Gaos. . . . She was embarrassed while writing that sentence; and that same name now comes again and again to her. Like a *demoiselle* she frequently passed her evenings at this window. Her father was opposed to her associating with other girls of her age, though once she was one of their number, and when he came out of the café to take his usual short walk, in company with old sailors, smoking and gossiping, he felt contented to see, sitting up there at her window, framed in granite and sur-

rounded by flower-pots, his rich, handsome daughter.

The son Gaos ! . . . She, against her will and wish, was looking toward the sea. Though not seen from this window, one could feel it to be very near,—just at the edge of those alleyways through which the boatmen were to be seen going and coming.

And her thoughts, attracted by fascinating and devouring objects, wandered away into the infinite expanse, far, far out there in the polar seas, where the *Marie*, Captain Guermeur, was cruising. . . .

What a strange boy this son Gaos was ! . . . fleeing out of her reach now, after once making advances so daring and yet so sweet. . . .

. . . . . .

Then in a long reverie, she went over all the events of her return to Brittany the year before.

Early on a cold foggy morning in December, after a night's journey, the Paris train had left them, her father and herself at Guingamp, where everything was half-sunk in obscurity. An un-

known feeling suddenly took hold of her at seeing this old small town, through which she had passed before only in the summer, so that she could hardly recognize it. She now experienced the sensation of plunging all at once, into what the country people speak as the "time,"—the remote time of the past. Such silence, after Paris! The tranquil life of people belonging to another world, rushing through the fog after their petty affairs! All these old gloomy stone houses blackened by dampness, and dim in the morning twilight; all these objects of Brittany—clothed in charms at this moment now that she loves Yann—had filled her that December morning with a desolate sadness. Early-rising housewives had already opened their doors, and passing she peeped through them and saw sitting before the fireplace grandames in their caps, just risen. As soon as it was a little lighter, she entered a church to tell her prayers. And how immense and melancholy had seemed to her this magnificent nave,—so different from Parisian churches, with its uneven pillars, worn at the base by the use of ages; with its vault all impregnated with

the odor of decay and saltpeter. In a deep recess behind the columns a wax taper was burning and a woman knelt before it, undoubtedly making some vow. The gleam of this flickering flame was lost in the indistinct outlines of arches. She at once found in herself the trace of a well-forgotten sentiment, a kind of melancholy and awe that she had felt before, a small child, when taken to hear the morning mass in the winter, at the church of Paimpol.

Certainly, she did not regret her departure from Paris, though she left there many beautiful and amusing things. At first, having the blood of sailors in her veins, she had felt the big city to be rather close, and then she felt there like a stranger, out of place. These *Parisiennes* were only women whose delicate forms had artificial bendings in the back, and who had a characteristic way of walking and fluttering about in whalebone cases. But she was too intelligent to ever try to copy these very closely. With her odd head-dress, ordered every year from Paimpol, she felt ill-at-ease in the streets of Paris, without the least idea that all who turned back to gaze at

her, was because she had a charming face to look at.

There were among these Parisian women some whose charms had great attraction for her, but she knew that they were inaccessible, and some others of a lower class, willing to make her acquaintance, were haughtily not taken notice of, as not worthy of her. So she had lived alone, without a friend, having no companion outside of her father, who was frequently absent on business. She did not now regret that life of solitude and seclusion.

But, for all that, on this day of her arrival she had had a painful surprise at the harsh appearance of Brittany, seen in the depth of winter. And the thought that she had still four or five hours' ride before she could get to Paimpol caused her an oppressive disquietude.

All the afternoon of that same dull day they had traveled, father and daughter, in an old small shaky diligence, open to the four winds ; passing in the fast falling night through dark villages under the shadows of trees down which the fog dripped in fine drops. Soon it became necessary

to light the lanterns, and now nothing could be seen but the tracks of two greenish bengal fires, which seemed to fly on both sides, ahead of the horses, these being the gleam of the two lanterns thrown over the interminable hedgerows of the road. How sudden this verdure in December ! . . . At first astonished she bent over to see better, and recognizing it, recalled to mind the furze, the eternal marine furze of the path and the cliffs, which never turn yellow in this region of Paimpol. Just then a warm breeze commenced to blow, whose breath she thought she had felt before ; it smelled of the sea. . . .

Towards the end of the journey she was all at once delighted and amused by the thought just occurred to her :

"Wait, the season being winter, this time I am going to see them, those fine Iceland fishermen."

They ought to be there in December, returned home, all of them, brothers, fiancés, lovers, and cousins, whose friends, old and young, had told her so much about them during their summer evening walks. This thought had absorbed her

mind while her motionless feet were freezing in the carriole. . . .

She had really seen them . . . and the fluttering heart of this girl was caught in the meshes of love for one of them. . . .

CHAPTER IV.

THE first time when she saw him, this Yann, was on the second day of her arrival, at the fête of *pardon* for the Icelanders, on the 8th of December, the day of Notre-Dame de Bonne Nouvelle, the patron saint of fishermen,—a little after the procession, still the somber streets decorated with white buntings, and decked with ivy and holly, with leaves and flowers of winter.

At this fête of Indulgence, under a gloomy sky, the merriment was dull and somehow rude,—merriment without gaiety, made up mostly of listlessness and defiance, of physical vigor and alcohol, and hanging over all these the universal menace of death.

There was great commotion in Paimpol, ringing of bells and chanting of priests everywhere. Rough and monotonous songs filled the taverns, old tunes to lull to sleep the seamen, old complaints issuing from the sea, coming I know not

whence, out of the dark night of time. Groups of sailors hand in hand, zigzagging through the streets, staggering as if on board in a storm, throwing ardent glances at women after their long continence on the sea. Groups of girls in white caps of nuns, their heart all in a flutter and trembling, and their beautiful eyes full of the longings of a whole summer. Old stone houses enclosing this rumbling crowd, old roofs telling about their struggle of centuries, against the westerly winds, against surge and rain, and against everything hurled out of the sea ; telling also about the hot quarrels they had sheltered, of audacious and amorous adventures.

There hovered all over this a religious sentiment, an impress of the past, with veneration for the old faith, the protective creed of the Immaculate and spotless Virgin. Next to the public houses stood the church with its steps all strewn with foliage, its portals open like a grand somber bay, its odor of incense, its wax-tapers burning in the dark, and the votive offerings of seamen hung everywhere over the sacred arches. By the side of love-stricken girls, the betrothed

of the dead sailors and the widows of the ship-wrecked were coming out of the chapels of the dead, with their shawls of mourning and little glossy caps; their eyes bent to the ground, silently passing through this bustle of life, like dire admonitions and there very close to these lay the sea, the foster-mother and the devourer of sturdy generations, agitated and roaring, to share in this fête.

All these left a confused impression on Gaud's mind. Excited and laughing, her heart compressed to the core, she felt a sort of anguish at the thought that these shores were to be hers forever. On the square they had games and sports, and when she was promenading there with her friends, they pointed to her, right and left, the young men of Paimpol and Ploubazlanec. A group of Icelanders, their backs turned towards her, stood listening to the plaintive notes of the music. From the first struck, by the tall stature and the massive shoulders of one seen among them, she made a remark tinged a little with mockery:

"What a big fellow he is!"

Perhaps from this phrase could be readily inferred the following :

" To the girl who marries him, what an encumbrance in the house ! he with his big shoulders ! "

He turned as if he had heard her remark and sizing her up from head to foot with a quick glance that might mean :

" Who is this elegant girl, with Paimpolese cap, that I haven't seen before ? "

Then politely lowering his eyes he seemed to be all attention to the music. Now only his long black hair could be seen hanging long and curly down on his neck.

Though she had freely inquired the names of many others she hesitated to ask about this one. His beautiful profile half seen ; his noble, wild look ; his tawny brown eyes glancing quickly at the opal blue of her eyes,—all these had impressed and intimidated her.

Indeed this must be the " son Gaos " of whom she had heard Grandma Moan speak as a great friend of Sylvestre, on the same evening of this festival of indulgence, she and her father, having

met him and Sylvestre, walking arm in arm, had greeted them. . . .

This little Sylvestre at once became again like a brother to her. Being cousins they had continued to *thee* and *thou* each other;—it is true she had at first hesitated, seeing this big boy of seventeen, already with black beard, but the gentle look of his eyes of childhood being not changed, she treated him as if she had never lost sight of him. When she returned to Paimpol she kept him to supper. This was only to be expected, and he ate with a good appetite never having enjoyed such a treat at home. . . .

To tell the truth, Yann had not been gallant enough to her during this first presentation,—at the corner of a gloomy street strewn with green twigs. He had timidly tipped his hat to her with a noble move of the head, then having cast the same quick glance over her, he turned his eyes away, seeming not to be very well satisfied with this meeting, and in haste to continue his way. A strong westerly breeze, that had begun to blow during the procession, had scattered over the ground branches of box wood, and covered the

sky with a dark gray veil. Gaud, in her dreamy rovings in the past, remembered all these vividly, —the gloomy fall of the night at the end of the fête ; the white buntings, decked with flowers, undulating in the wind along the walls ; the noisy groups of Icelanders, men of the wind and tempest, singing gaily and entering the taverns to shelter themselves against the fast approaching rain ; and above all the big fellow standing in front of her turning the head with a troubled and annoyed look at having encountered her. . . . What profound changes had worked in her since that period ! . . .

What a difference between the din and clamor at the finish of that fête, and the quiet of the present ! How empty and silent was that same Paimpol this evening, during the long warm twilight of May, which kept her at the window, alone, dreaming, and in love ! . . .

CHAPTER V.

THE second time they saw each other was at a wedding. Son Gaos had been chosen as her escort. At first she thought she would oppose the idea of marching with him through the streets, where his tall figure could be noticed by everybody ; moreover, she did not know what to speak to him on the way ! . . . And then he inspired her with fear by his wild manner.

At the fixed hour, when everybody was ready for the procession, Yann did not appear. The time was passing, but he did not come. And already they were making up their minds not to wait for him any longer. Now she perceived that she was dressed up only for him. With any one of the other young men, the festival, and the ball, would lack something, and lose their charms for her. At last he arrived, also, finely dressed. He made the following excuses to the bride's parents : —From England it had been signaled, that the

same evening, large shoals of fish, quite unexpectedly were to pass near their shores, a little off Auriguy. Then those owning boats in Ploubazlanec, made hasty preparations. A big commotion and uproar followed in the villages. Wives in search of their husbands in the public-houses urging them to hurry; they themselves hauling out the sails, helping in the movements of the boats; in a word, there was a great turmoil all along the shore.

In the midst of all the people around him, he related with an easy manner; with gestures of his own, rolling his eyes, and with a good-natured smile, that showed his white teeth. To express better the precipitate haste of this people to set sail, he, from time to time, while talking, uttered the ejaculation, *how*, prolonged and droll, —a cry peculiar to sailors to convey the idea of swiftness, and which sounded like the whizz of the wind.

And, in this short time, he himself had been obliged to find somebody to take his place; and make the owner of the bark, by whom he was employed for the winter, to accept this substi-

tute. This had been the cause of his delay ; and, unwilling to be absent from the wedding, he had to give up his share in the fishing.

These reasons were very well understood by the listening fishermen, and no one was dissatisfied with him ; they knew very well that everything in their lives, was, more or less, dependent on the whims of the sea, and subject to the changes of the weather, and to the mysterious migrations of the fish. The other Icelanders standing by only regretted that they had not been informed of it soon enough to profit themselves, like the Ploubazlanec fishermen, by the fortune passing so near their shores.

Now being too late they could do nothing but offer their arms to the girls. The violins began to play outside, and the wedding party started along merrily.

At first he addressed her with usual courteous remarks of no special import, as every young man does in weddings to young girls whom he does not know very well. Among these gay couples only these two were strangers to each other. The others in the procession were cousins

or fiancés ; there were also many pairs of lovers ; for in this district in Paimpol there is a good deal of love-making, at this period when they are back from Iceland. (But being honest, this always ends in marrying each other.)

But, in the evening during the dance, their conversation having turned about this passage of fish, looking her straight in the eyes, brusquely he told her something very unexpected :

"No one else but you, in Paimpol,—and even in the whole world,—could have kept me back from sailing. No, surely, for no other person I would have stayed back from my fishing, Mademoiselle Gaud. . . ."

She was astonished, at first, that a fisherman dared talk to her like this, to her, who had come to this ball as a queen ; and, then, deliciously charmed she ended by the following answer :

"Thank you, Monsieur Yann, I myself do prefer your company to any other."

This had been all. But from that moment to the end of the dance they began to speak to each other in a different way, in gentler and lower voices. . . .

They danced to the music of the hurdy-gurdy and the violin, the same pairs almost always together. After dancing with some other girl, for propriety's sake, when he came back to lead her to the dance, they exchanged friendly smiles and continued their former conversation, which had been very intimate. Yann was telling her naïvely abou this fisherman's life, his toils, his wages, and about all the difficulties he had at home, when he was compelled to support fourteen little Gaoses, being their eldest brother. At present they were much better off, chiefly because their father had come across a wreck in the Manche, the sale of which fetched them ten thousand francs, not counting the share due to the state. By this they were enabled to add another story to their house, which was situated on the edge of the Ploubazlanec region, at the end of the land, in the hamlet of Pors-Even, overlooking the Manche with a most splendid view.

"The lot of the Icelander is very hard. To part, from here, as we do, in the month of February, for a distant land, so cold and dark, with a treacherous sea. . . ."

. . . While watching the night fall over Paimpol, she, in her thoughts, went over all their conversation had during the ball, which she recalled as something of yesterday. If he did not have the idea of marriage in his head, why did he go over all the details of his life, to which she had listened with the ears of a fiancée? . . . He did not seem to have the looks of a vulgar fellow in the habit of talking to everybody about his private affairs. . . .

. . . "Just the same I like my occupation," he had told. "I would never give it up. Some years I make eight hundred francs, and some twelve hundred, which as soon as I receive on my return, I take to my mother."

"You take it to your mother, Monsieur Yann?"

"Oh! yes, always the whole of it. Among us Icelanders this is the custom, Mademoiselle Gaud." (He told this, as something very proper and natural.) "Thus you wouldn't believe, that I almost always have no money. On Sundays, when I come to Paimpol, I take some from my mother. It's the same thing with all of us.

This year my father had this new suit made for me, which I have now on, without which I never would have been willing to come to this wedding. Oh ! no, certainly not, I would not have come here to give you my arm with the last year's coat on. . . . "

To her, accustomed to see the Parisians, it was not very elegant, this new suit of Yann's, with its very short jacket opening on a vest of rather an old style ; but the form it covered was irreproachably handsome, and, just the same the dancer had a grand appearance.

Every time he said something he looked smilingly in her eyes to see what she thought. And how her look remained honest and composed, when he was telling her all that to make her know that he was not rich ! Looking him always straight in the face, she also smiled at him ; hardly answering him, but listening to him with all her soul ; always more and more admiring him and drawn to him. What a mixture he was of wild roughness and coaxing child-play ! His manly voice, which with others was brusque and curt, when talking to her, took a gentle and

caressing tone; only for her he knew how to vibrate it with an extremely harmonious sweetness, like the hidden music in chorded instruments. What a singular, unexpected fact, that this big fellow, with a graceful gait, terrible look, always treated at home like a child, finding it quite natural; and who had made the round of the world, seen its adventures, known its dangers, yet should keep for his parents such respectful and absolute submission.

She compared him with some others. With three or four coxcombs of Paris, clerks, scribblers, and what not, who had pursued her with their adorations for her money. This one, besides being the most handsome, seemed to her to be the best of all.

Not to make him feel ill at ease, she had related to him that formerly they also did not have always the same easy life in her own home; that her father had started as an Iceland fisherman, and always had felt great respect for the Icelanders; that she herself remembered, when a small child, running about barefooted over the beach, after the death of her poor mother. . . .

. . . Oh ! that night of the ball, that delicious night, decisive and unique in her life,—that was quite long ago, December was its date and now it is May. All those handsome dancers were now fishing out there, dispersed, in the Icelandic sea, —where the pale sun shines bright in their immense solitude, while everything in Brittany is quiet and immersed in darkness.

Gaud still remained at the window. The market-place of Paimpol, shut in nearly on every side with old houses, was getting more and more melancholy with the fall of night ; no sound could be heard anywhere. Above the houses the still luminous void of the sky seemed to be hollowed, detached, and separated from earthly objects, so that at this hour of twilight, the gable-ends and the old roofs were silhouetted against the sky. At intervals, a door or a window was shut ; some old sailor with a staggering gait coming out of a public-house was going up one of those small dark alleys ; some girls were returning from their evening walks, rather late, carrying bunches of flowers of May. One of them, on recognizing Gaud, greeted her and

lifted up high to her a branch of hawthorn to let her smell of it ; it could be seen still in this transparent darkness, the light tufts of the white flowers. There was yet another sweet smell coming up from the garden and the courtyard, that of the honeysuckles in blossom along the stone walls,—and also the faint odor of the sea-wrack, brought from the harbor. Bats were gliding through the air like creations of dreams.

Gaud had passed many evenings at this window looking on this gloomy square thinking of the departed Icelanders and always of the same ball. . . .

. . . It had been very warm at the end of the dance, and some of the waltzers began to feel dizzy. She recalled him as he danced with others, girls and women, with whom he must have flirted, more or less ; she recalled also the disdainful condescension with which he answered to their remarks. . . . How different was he behaving with them all ! . . .

He was a charming dancer, straight as an ancient oak, his head thrown back, whirling round with light and noble step. His curly brown

hair fell over his forehead, shaken by the breeze made by dancing; Gaud, who was quite tall, felt those curls touch her cap when he leaned towards her to hold her more tightly in the rapid movements of the waltz.

Every now and then, he pointed out to her his little sister Marie dancing with Sylvestre, her fiancé. He laughed good-naturedly, seeing the two so young, so shy with each other, bowing to one another, and whispering timidly things no doubt very sweet. Certainly he wouldn't have it otherwise; but it was evident that he amused himself, roving and enterprising as he was, to find them so innocent. He exchanged with Gaud smiles of mutual intimate understanding, which perhaps meant:

"How ridiculous and funny they are to look at, *our* little brother and sister."

There was a lot of kissing at the end of the night. Kisses of brothers, kisses of fiancé's, kisses of sweethearts, which, in spite of everything, kept an honest and frank appearance, thus given full-heartedly and before everybody. It can be guessed that he did not embrace her; it could

never be permitted to kiss the daughter of Monsieur Mével; perhaps he only pressed her a little too close to his heart during the last waltz, and she, on the contrary, being sanguine, did not oppose it but yielded to him entirely. In this profound, sudden and delicious giddiness which attracted her, in full force, towards him, perhaps the senses of a girl of twenty had much to do with it, but it was in the heart that this impulse found its birth.

"Have you seen that brazen-faced girl? see how she looks at him!" Thus were talking two or three pretty girls, their eyes modestly lowering under light or dark lashes, and who had among the dancers, at least, one lover or maybe two. Indeed she was continually gazing at him, but she had this good excuse that he was the first and the only young man to whom she had ever paid any attention in her life.

At the parting in the morning, when everybody left in confusion, in the cold, early dawn, they bid each other good-by, in a different fashion, like two sweethearts who expect to meet again the next day. On her way home she had crossed this

same square with her father, hardly feeling tired, alert and gay, ravished with life, loving this hilly fog and gloomy dawn, and finding everything exquisite and pleasant.

. . . The May night had long since fallen ; the windows had been shut one by one with little sounds of grating iron bolts. Gaud still remained there, leaving hers open. The few last passers-by, distinguishing in the dark her white cap, must have said :

"There is a girl who, surely, is dreaming of her sweetheart ;" and that was true, she was dreaming of him—with a longing to weep ; her little white teeth bit her lips constantly, trying to deface the crease underlining the curve of her youthful mouth. And her eyes were fixed steadfast on the darkness, without a look on real objects. . . .

. . . But after that ball, why did he not come back ? what had changed him ? Whenever they met by chance he seemed to avoid her, turning away his eyes always with the same rapid movement.

She had talked often with Sylvestre about this, who did not understand it any better :

"Nevertheless you ought to get married with him, Gaud," he would say, "if your father has no objection; for you cannot find his equal in this part of the country. First, I tell you he is very wise, though he doesn't show it much; he very seldom gets intoxicated. Though sometimes a little stubborn, at heart he is very pleasant. No, you never can know how good he is. And what a sailor! Every fishing season all the captains quarrel to secure his services. . . ."

She was pretty sure of obtaining her father's permission, for he never opposed any of her wishes. That he was not rich, he was indifferent about it. For a sailor like him needed only a little money advanced to him to follow for six months the coasting service; and he would soon be made a captain to whom all shipowners would willingly trust their vessels.

She did not care if he was a little of a giant; for to be sturdy and strong may be considered a defect in women, but in a man it does not affect his beauty.

She had made inquiries, without seeming to do so, from girls who knew about all the love-

affairs of the neighborhood. He never was known to have had any attachments ; he went about right and left in Lézardrieux, as well as in Paimpol, after beauties who tried hard to please him, but he did not seem to care more for one than for another.

One Sunday evening, very late, she had seen him pass by her window, having on his arm, close to him, a certain Jeannie Caroff, decidedly pretty in the face, but who had a bad reputation. This, indeed, had given her a cruel pain.

They had also informed her that he was very hot-tempered : getting intoxicated one night, in a certain café in Paimpol, where the Iceland fishermen hold their festivities, he had hurled a big marble table through a door, which they refused to open to him. . . .

All these she could forgive him : she knew how the sailors act when they are roused. . . . But if he had a good heart why did he pay her such attention, only to desert her afterwards,—she who had never dreamed of him ; why had he gazed at her so much that night, lavishing his beautiful smiles, seemingly so frank, lowering his voice to whisper his devotions as if she were his fiancée?

Now she could never attach herself to anybody else or change her affections. In this same country, formerly, when she was a little child, they used to scold and tell her that she was a naughty girl, and obstinate like nobody else ; she still remained so. Now grown a beautiful young woman, haughty in her bearing, whom nobody had ever fashioned or influenced ; at heart she really remained the same.

After that ball the whole winter had passed in the expectation of seeing him ; but he had not come even to tell her good-by before his departure for Iceland. Now that he was gone, there was nothing left to her ; the time now would drag slowly on until the time of his return in the autumn, when, according to her intention, she would come to a clear understanding with him, and put an end to the matter. . . .

. . . The town-hall clock struck the hour of eleven,—with that clear ring as we hear only in quiet spring nights.

Eleven o'clock is very late in Paimpol ; so Gaud, closing the window, lighted the lamp to get ready to retire. . . .

This, on the part of Yann, was perhaps mere shyness; or being too proud, was he afraid to be refused, thinking her too rich? . . . Already she had wanted to find out this herself from him; but Sylvestre had thought this could not be done, it was not nice for a young girl to be so bold. In Paimpol they had begun already to criticise her manner and dress. . . .

. . . She undressed herself with the distracted languor of a girl who is lost in dreams: first, her muslin cap, then her elegant dress, cut in city style, and threw them carelessly on the chair. Then her long corsets, which had been the talk of the town, on account of her Parisian figure. Her form, once more free, became more perfect. No longer compressed and restrained in the waist, the lines regained their natural contour, which were full and smooth as a marble statue. All of her motions took a new appearance, and each one of her postures were exquisite to see.

The little lamp, which was the only one burning at this late hour, cast a mysterious light over her shoulders and bosom and the beautiful form never gazed upon by mortal eyes; and which

would surely be lost to all and fade unseen, because of Yann's unwillingness to have her. . . .

She knew that she had lovely features, but she was not fully conscious of the beauty of her form. Yet, in this part of Brittany, this type of beauty is so common among the daughters of Icelanders, that nobody takes any notice of it, and even the less modest, instead of making a parade of it, were bashful enough to hide it. No, only the refined men of the cities attach so much importance to it as to have it molded and painted. . . .

She began to undo the rolls of her hair that were coiled behind her ears like a snail, and let fall the two braids over her back like two serpents; then she tied them on her head like a crown,—this being more convenient for her when sleeping. Now with her clear-cut profile she looked like a Roman Vestal.

Still her arms were lifted, and always biting her lip, she continued to stroke her light hair with her fingers, like a child who torments a doll when thinking of something else. After letting it fall down again she began to undo and loosen it by the way of amusing herself. Soon she was

all covered down to her hips, looking very much like some forest druid.

Then her eyes, heavy with sleep, in spite of her love, in spite of her desire to cry, she threw herself hastily down on the bed and hid her form with the silky mass of her hair that was spread like a veil. . . .

. . . . . .

In a hut in Ploubazlanec Grandma Moan, who was nearer to the dark verge of life, was also overcome by sleep,—the icy sleep of the aged, dreaming of her son and of death.

At this same hour, on board the *Marie*,—over the northern sea, very turbulent that evening,—Yann and Sylvestre, the two, so well beloved, were singing, and all the while gaily fishing in the light of eternal day. . . .

CHAPTER VI.

AROUND Iceland they had now that rare weather which the sailors call the "*white calm*"; nothing stirred in the air, as if all the breezes were drained and exhausted.

The sky was covered all over with a heavy whitish veil which grew darker down towards the horizon, changing first to heavy gray and lower down to the somber shades of tin. And beneath, the motionless waters shone in a pale light wearying the eye and passing a shiver all over the body.

At that moment the waters rippled, nothing but ripples playing over the sea, producing light rings like those on a mirror made by blowing. The glittering expanse seemed all covered with a net-work of indistinct design, interwoven and twisted, being quickly effaced and very fleeting.

It was impossible to tell whether this was eternal evening or endless morning; the sun no more

indicates any hour, but remains always there to preside over the resplendence of mortal things, being itself only another ring, almost with no outline, growing infinitely big by a dim halo.

Yann and Sylvestre, busy fishing side by side, were singing: *Jean-François de Nantes*, that song with no end to it, amusing themselves with its very monotony, and, looking at each other with a sly wink, they laughed at the childish drollery of repeating that same refrain over and over again, and trying each time to put new fervor in it. Their cheeks were flushed in the sea atmosphere; the air they inhaled was pure and vivifying; they filled their lungs with it,—the source of all vigor and all life.

Yet there were appearances of non-existence around them, those of extinguished lives and those of things not created yet; the light had no warmth; objects remained motionless as if frozen under the gaze of that spectral eye,—the sun.

The *Marie* cast on the expanse a shadow long as the evening, looking greenish in the midst of the polished surface, reflecting the whiteness of the sky. In this shadow, which did not reflect,

one could distinguish through the transparent surface all that was going on below it : countless fishes, thousands of myriads, all alike, gliding quietly in the same direction, as if they had the same goal in view in their eternal march. These were codfish, executing their evolutions together, all marching in parallel lines, giving an effect of gray hatchings and continually moving forward with a rapid quivering that gave a fluid appearance to this mass of silent lives. Sometimes with an abrupt movement of the tail, all turned round at one time showing the silvery scales of their bellies, and then the same movement of the tail, the same turn of the body would propagate through the whole group with slow undulations, like so many metal plates shining between two sheets of water.

The sun, already very low, was still on the decline ; then surely this was evening. The nearer it descended to the lead-colored zones, its ring became clearer and more real. You could stare at it as at the moon. It still shone ; but you could imagine it to be not very far out in the space ; it seemed as though if one sailed on a vessel to the

edge of the horizon, one would come across that big, sorry-looking balloon, floating in the air a few yards above the waters.

The fishing was going on, and looking in the calm water, it could be seen how it was done: the codfish with a gluttonous movement came to get a bite and when feeling themselves pricked they shook themselves, thus making only the matter worse. Every minute with both hands the fishermen quickly pulled their lines, throwing them in the boat to be cleaned and flattened out.

The Paimpolese flotilla was dispersed over this tranquil mirror animating the water. There could be seen little boats in the far distance hoisting their sails, though there was not a breath of breeze, looking all white and their outlines well cut against the gray background of the horizon.

On this day the occupation of the Icelander was so quiet, was so easy ;—the occupation of a young girl. . . .

. . . . . .

Jean François de Nantes
Jean-François,
Jean-François !

They were singing like two big boys. And Yann cared very little that he was so handsome and had such a noble look. He was a child only with Sylvestre, singing and playing only with him ; on the contrary, he was reserved with the others and always very haughty and grave ; very gentle when they needed his help, always kind and at their service when he was not vexed.

While they were singing this song two others, a few steps away, were singing something else, some other chant composed of drowsiness, of healthy vigor and vague melancholy.

Nobody was weary, and the time passed. Below in the cabin they had always fire in the iron-stove and the lid of the hatchway was kept closed to give the illusion of night to those sleeping. They needed very little air when asleep ; people with less robust constitutions, brought up in the cities, would want much more ; but the lungs having been inflated all day long with the clear air of these regions they also needed rest and they hardly moved. There one can crouch in any kind of a hole like animals.

After finishing their work they could sleep any

time they liked. In this perpetual daylight the hours don't differ much from each other. And it was with a sound sleep that they rested, without dreams, without tossing about.

If they happened to think about women, their sleep would be disturbed. Their eyes would never close at the thought that the fishing would end in six weeks, and that they would find new loves or return to the old ones. But this hardly happened ; or, they thought about it in a rather honest manner ; they recalled to mind their wives and fiancées, their sisters and parents. . . . But with a habitual continence and absorbed in their work, during this long period their feelings ran through another channel. . . .

. . . . . .

" Jean-François de Nantes ;
Jean-François,
Jean-François ! "

. . . Now they were looking at something hardly perceptible ; far away in the gray horizon, a smoke was rising above the waters like a microscopic tail, of a different gray color, of a little darker shade than that of the sky. With

eyes accustomed to pierce the farthest corner of the sky they had soon perceived it :—

" A steamboat yonder ! "

" I have an idea," said the captain looking at it carefully, " I have an idea that is a steamboat of the Government,—the cruiser coming to make its round. . . ."

This vague smoke was bringing to the fishermen news from France, and among others, a certain letter from a grandmother written by the hand of a young girl.

It approached slowly ; soon they could see its black hull,—it was really the cruiser making a tour of inspection among these fiords of the west.

At the same time, a light breeze having risen blowing sharp, began to stir up here and there the dead waters ; it traced over the shining mirror designs of bluish green, lengthening in paths, opening like a fan, and branching in the form of madrepores ; thus it came up with a whistling as if to herald the end of the immense torpor, enveloping everything. And the sky, its veil being torn to shreds, became now clear. The mists fell

once more over the horizon like accumulated heaps of gray waddings building up moldering walls around the sea. The two mirrors between which stood the fishermen—one above and the other down below—both took again their perfect transparency, as if the vapor dimming them had been wiped out. The weather was changing, but not in an agreeable manner.

And from different points of the sea, from different directions of the expanse, were fast arriving fishing vessels, all belonging to France, roaming in these latitudes, from Brittany, Normandy, Boulogne, and Dunkirk. Like birds floating together at a call they gathered around the cruiser ; they came even from the empty corner of the horizon, their little grayish wings were seen everywhere. They suddenly peopled the waste.

No longer drifting they had opened their sails to the newly stirring fresh breezes, and now they were fast approaching with great speed.

Iceland, too, was seen in the distance, seeming as if it also would hurry to get nearer ; it began to show gradually, more distinctly its high

mountains and bare rocks, which have been lighted only on one side, or from underneath and unwillingly, as it were. Next to it there rose another Iceland, of the same color, accentuated by degrees; but this one was chimerical, and whose gigantic mountains were nothing but condensation of vapor. The sun, ever low and lagging, unable to climb higher, was seen through this illusory island in such a way as if it stood in front of it, this being incomprehensible and puzzling to the eye. It had no longer any halo, and its round disk had regained its well-defined shape, and it looked like a poor, yellow dying planet that had remained there undecided in the midst of a chaos. . . .

The cruiser, which by this time had come to a standstill, was surrounded by Icelander pleiads. Boats, like so many nutshells, lowered from the vessels, hurried to the cruiser, packed with rough, long-bearded fellows. They were asking for every sort of thing, just like children. Some wanted medicines for small cuts · others, mending materials; some provisions, and some others, letters. Some of these wild-looking fellows were

brought over by their captains to be put in irons to make penance for their mutinous conduct. As they had all seen service in the Government, this seemed quite natural to them. And when the narrow spardeck was crowded with four or five of these big fellows with iron rings round their ankles, the old mates who had padlocked them would tell them : —"Lie down crosswise, boys, that people may pass," and they would obey them readily, even with a smile.

This time there were many letters for the Icelanders. Among others two for the *Marie, Captain Guermeur*, one of which was addressed to *Monsieur Gaos, Yann ;* and the other for *Monsieur Moan, Sylvestre.* (This latter having arrived by the *Danemark* to Reickavick, where the cruiser had picked it up.)

The steward, taking them out of his canvas bag, distributed them, having a lot of trouble in reading the addresses written by hands not much used to that kind of work.

Thereupon the commander said :

"Hurry and make haste, the barometer is falling."

He felt somewhat troubled, seeing so many small nutshells afloat, and so many fishermen assembled in these dangerous regions.

Yann and Sylvestre always read their letters together. This time they were read by the gleam of the midnight sun which was shining above the horizon with the same look of a dead star.

Their arms around each other's shoulders they sat by themselves in a corner of the deck reading very slowly to understand the better the news from home.

In Yann's letter Sylvestre found news of Marie, his young fiancée; in that of Sylvestre, Yann read the funny stories of Grandmother Yvonne, who had not her equal in amusing those away from home. And he read also the last paragraph which concerned him specially: "My Greetings to Son Gaos."

Having finished reading the letters Sylvestre timidly showed his letter to Yann, trying to make him appreciate the handwriting.

"See what a nice hand this is, Yann, isn't it?" But Yann, who knew too well whose writing that

was, shrugging his shoulders turned his head one side, which meant that he was disgusted to always hear about Gaud.

Whereupon Sylvestre carefully folded the scorned piece of paper, and putting it back in the envelope slipped it in his waistcoat pocket, next to his heart, muttering gloomily to himself:

"I am pretty sure, they never will marry. . . . But what can he possibly have against her? . . ."

. . . The bell of the cruiser struck midnight, And they still sat there dreaming of home, of the absent ones and a thousand other things, as in a reverie. . . .

Then the eternal sun having just dipped its edge in the sea, commenced to climb up slowly.

And it was morning. . . .

PART SECOND.

CHAPTER I.

. . . The Iceland sun had also changed its appearance, and the day opened with a sinister morning. Totally freed of its veil, it spread about long rays, which shot through the heavens like jets that announced the approach of bad weather.

The weather had been fine for the last few days ; that was to end very soon. The wind blew over this group of boats, as if it wanted, by scattering them, to clear the sea. And they began to disperse, to flee like a routed army, pursued by this menace written in the air and which was not to be ignored.

It was blowing harder and harder, giving the shiver to men and vessels.

The waves, still quite small, were chasing each other to be heaped in a mass. At first they were

crowned with white foam spread on their tops in folds; then with a shriveling began to exhale steam; it looked as if they were boiling; and the sharp din increased every minute.

Nobody thought about fishing now, but all gave their attention to the managing of the boats.

The lines had been long ago drawn in. They all hurried to move on. Some, in search of a shelter in the fiords trying to reach there in time. Others preferred to round the southern point of Iceland, considering it much safer to be in the open sea, having ahead of them plenty of space to run before the wind. They could still see each other. Here and there, in the trough of the sea, the sails wagged, poor little wet things, tired and flying, but were always put to rights, like a child's toy made of pith, which after being blown over resumes its erect attitude.

The great heap of clouds, which stood compact like an island on the western horizon, was now breaking up overhead and the fragments were being scattered all over the sky. This heap seemed inexhaustible: the wind extended, diffused and stretched it, bringing out to view an

indefinite line of dark curtains, hanging over the clear, yellowish sky, now turned livid, cold and dreary.

The wind blew harder and harder, agitating everything.

The cruiser had made for the sheltering coves of Iceland. Only the fishing craft was left on this seething sea, which had taken a sinister look and a dreadful color. They pushed on their preparations for foul weather. Between them the distance was fast increasing, and some were lost sight of.

The waves, curling up in volutes, were supplanting each other, then mingling climbed one over the other, thus swelling higher and higher. Between them the hollows were deepened.

In a few hours, everything was plowed and upset in this watery region, where all was so calm and tranquil but yesterday; and in place of the former silence, now there reigned a deafening uproar. All this agitation of the present, what a dissolving spectacle, unconscious, useless, and all so quickly done! To what purpose all these! . . . what mystery of blind destruction! . . .

The clouds managed to enshroud the heavens, and still issuing from the west, piled in layers, hurrying on swiftly and darkening everything. Only a few yellow patches were left uncovered, through which the sun streamed down its last sheaves of rays, and the water, almost green, was gradually striped in white foam.

At noon the *Marie* was all ready to face foul weather. Her hatchways were closed; and her sails storm-reefed; she bounded along light and agile. In the midst of the disorder now commencing she seemed to gambol like a big porpoise, whose delight is in tempests. With only a foresail, she was simply "scudding before the wind,"—an expression used by sailors to designate this gait.

All was steeped in darkness overhead; a close crushing vault with some coal-black, shapeless spots spread over it, looking like a dome almost immovable; and it was necessary to watch it sharply to ascertain that, on the contrary, it was in a full swing of motion,—endless gray sheets hastening to pass on, and ceaselessly replaced by others issuing forth from the depths of the hori-

zon,—draperies of darkness unwinding as from a never-ending roll. . . .

The *Marie* was flying before the wind, faster and faster; and the wind itself was flying before something mysterious and terrible. The gale, the sea, the *Marie*, and the clouds, all alike, possessed by the same madness, were flying swiftly in the same direction. The wind hurried the quickest, next the surging billows rising slowly and heavily ran after it, last the *Marie* was carried along by this general movement. Wavelets, with their pallid crests, rolling in a perpetual tumble, were fast pursuing her; and she, always overtaken and outrun, managed to escape by means of the deep furrows left in her wake, upon whose eddies their fury was spent.

An illusion of lightness was the main thing to be noticed in this spectacle of flight; without any trouble and effort she seemed to bound along. When the *Marie* was lifted on the waves it was without a jerk, as it was raised by the wind, and her descent was only a sliding with the same sensation in the stomach as when one shoots down in a "Russian car" the chutes or like imaginary falls

in dreams. She seemed to slide backwards, the flying mountain stealing away from under her, to continue on its onward movement ; then she would suddenly plunge down in one of those hollows that were moving on also. She touched, without getting wet or bruising herself, the frightful depths which were, like the rest, fleeing ; which were fleeing and disappearing like smoke, like nothing. . . .

It was very dark in the depths of these watery hollows. After leaping over each wave you could see another coming from behind ; that one was still larger and of a greenish hue in its transparency, and which hurried to approach in furious convolution with crests ready to close, as if saying :

" Wait till I clutch you ; and then I will swallow you up. . . ."

. . . But no, it has only lifted you up, just as a feather is lifted by the shrug of shoulders ; it has only passed gently under you, with its seething froth, and the roar of a cataract.

And so on continuously. But always they grew bigger. Wave succeeded wave, getting

more enormous, like long chains of mountains, whose valleys began to be frightful. And all this wild madness of movement was accelerating under a sky growing darker and darker, in the midst of an all-pervading uproar.

This was, surely, bad weather, and it was necessary to be watchful; but they had much open space ahead of them, much space to run in! And then this same year the *Marie* had passed the season in the westernmost parts of Iceland fisheries, so that in this furious way that they were traversing over the sea towards east, they were getting nearer home.

Yann and Sylvestre were at the helm, fastened by the waist. They still sang the song of *Jean-François de Nantes;* intoxicated by movement and swiftness, they sang at the top of their voices, laughing that they could not hear each other in this deafening uproar, amusing themselves by turning their heads to sing against the wind and so lose breath.

"Well, my boys, does it smell close up here too?" asked Guermeur, putting out his bearded

face through the half-open hatchway, like the devil, ready to jump out of his box.

Oh ! no, it did not smell close up there, sure enough. They were not afraid, having the exact notion of the dangers they had to grapple with, having confidence in their boat, and in the strength of their arms, and because she had danced this same wild dance for forty years of Iceland voyages, under the protection of the Virgin in faïence, always smiling between bouquets of artificial flowers. . . .

Jean-François de Nantes;
Jean-François,
Jean-François !

Generally speaking, nothing was possible to see very far around them ; a few hundred meters away everything took on an aspect of vague fright ; pallid crests were frothing, obstructing the view. One would imagine himself to be in the midst of a narrow, but constantly changing, scene ; and, moreover, objects were sunk in a sort of watery smoke, fleeting like a cloud, with great swiftness over the entire surface of the sea.

But, at intervals, a cleft was opened in the northwest, whence a sudden veering of the wind might come ; then a shivering light would gleam over the horizon, a languishing reflection play on the white turbulent waves, making the vault of the heavens seem covered with duskier shadows. And these open spots in the sky were sad to behold ; these distant glimpses filled the heart with dismay ; for it made them see that the same chaos and the same fury were everywhere,—even behind the wide, empty horizon, and infinitely beyond. The terror was unlimited ; and one felt alone in the midst of all !

An unearthly clamor was issuing from earthly objects, like a prelude of the Apocalypse, spreading fright, as if the end of the world was at hand. Thus could be distinguished myriads of voices ; they came from above, hissing and roaring, as if from a far distance,—so immense was their volume. And this was the wind, the moving power of this disorder, the invisible force directing everything. It was frightful, but there were other noises besides, nearer, more material,

more menacing, that made the water boil and seethe as on live coal. . . .

All the time this was increasing.

And, in spite of their aspect of flight, the sea commenced to cover them, "to eat them up" as they said. At first sprays lashed from behind and masses of water hurled with a big force, smashing almost everything. The waves were swelling to dizzy heights; and yet, being divided into proportional parts, around which could be seen greenish fragments, formed of the falling water splashed by the wind. They fell in heavy masses on the deck with a crash, and the *Marie* shuddered all over, as if with pain. On account of the white foam spattered all around, nothing could be seen; and when the squalls were groaning madly she would rush in the whirlwind like the dust on the roads in summer time. A heavy rain was now pouring down in torrents slantingly, almost horizontally; and all in a mass hissed, slashed, and wounded like thongs.

They both stood at the helm, fastened and standing firm, dressed in oilskins, durable and glossy like the skin of the shark, which were tightened

with tarred cord, close on the neck and at the wrists and ankles, to prevent the water from running in ; and it all trickled down over them ; and when it poured down harder, they doubled up their backs and held fast, so as not to be thrown overboard. The skin of their cheeks was burning and every minute their breath getting short. After each heavy fall of water they looked at each other, smiling at the look their beards presented, all covered with salt.

In the long run, however, this was getting very fatiguing ; all this fury and madness, instead of getting appeased, always continued in their exasperating paroxysm. The rage of man and that of the beast becomes exhausted, and does not last very long ;—but they have to submit for a long time to the fury of inanimate objects, that have neither cause nor purpose, and are mysterious as life itself and death.

Jean-François de Nantes ;
Jean-François,
Jean-François !

Still the refrain of the old song taken up un-

consciously passed from time to time through their blanched lips, but only like something voiceless. Excess of motion and uproar had intoxicated them, and in spite of their youth, their smiles were only grimaces, and their teeth, shattered by the shivering cold, their eyes, half closed, under their burning and beating eyelids, were glazed in wild helplessness. Nailed to the helm like two marble buttresses they made all the necessary movements with their shriveled and blue hands, almost without thinking, by the sheer habit of the muscles. With their hair streaming and mouths contracted, they had an outlandish look, all the primitive savagery of man reappearing.

They could no longer see each other! They were conscious only of being there side by side. In moments of greatest danger every time that a new mountain, overhanging from behind, came roaring to knock their boat with a dull crash, one of their hands would move mechanically to make the sign of the cross. They no longer had thoughts for anything, neither for Gaud, nor for woman, nor for marriage. This lasted very long.

Drunk by the din, by fatigue and by cold, everything in their heads was a blank. They were but two pillars of stiffened flesh clinging to that helm ; only two strong beasts cramped there by instinct, determined not to die.

CHAPTER II.

. . . . . .

. . . In Brittany, towards the end of September, on a bracing morning, Gaud was walking all alone across the moors of Ploubazlanec, in the direction of Pors-Even.

The Iceland vessels had been back nearly a month, with the exception of two wrecked in that June storm. But the *Marie* having held her own, Yann and the rest of the crew were safely back home.

Gaud was much embarrassed at the thought of going to Yann's house.

Since his return from Iceland, she had seen him only once, when they had all gone to see Sylvestre depart for the military service. (They had accompanied him to the coach-house, he crying a little, his grandmother crying much more, and so he had bid them all good-by to join his regiment in Brest.) Yann, who had also come to

embrace his little friend, had feigned turning his eyes away when she looked at him ; as there were a good many people around the coach (for other recruits also were departing and whose folks had assembled there to see them off), they did not have any chance to speak to each other.

At last, though somewhat timid, she made the strong resolution of going to Gaos' house.

Her father, formerly, had had some common interest with Yann's father,—some complicated business, which among peasants and fishermen alike never comes to an end,—and he owed him a hundred francs due from the sale of a boat just taken place.

"You ought to let me carry that money to him, father," she had told him. "I would be glad to see Marie Gaos ; and then having never been so far in Ploubazlanec, I would enjoy this long walk very much."

She had, really, an anxious curiosity to know Yann's family, where she might some day go to live ; and also, wanted to see their house and the village.

In one of their last conversations Sylvestre, be-

fore parting, had explained to her, in his own way, the wild nature of his friend :

"You see, Gaud, it's just like this, he doesn't wish to marry with any one, at least that's his idea ; he loves the sea like nothing else, and even, one day, jokingly he told us that he had promised to wed her."

She forgave his peculiar habits ; and recalling to mind only his sweet, frank smile, on the night of the ball, she was filled once more with hope.

If she now encountered him at the house, surely she would not tell him anything ; her intention was not to be so bold. But he perhaps, seeing her close by, would speak to her. . . .

CHAPTER III.

She was walking for an hour quickly agitated, inhaling the pure breeze from the sea. At the crossroads there were large crucifixes planted.

At great intervals she passed through small hamlets of fishermen, which are, all the year round, beaten by the wind, and are of the same color as the rocks. In one of these villages, where the path narrowed suddenly between two gloomy walls, and high roofs with pointed thatches, so much like Celtic huts, the sign of a tavern made her smile: "Chinese cider," and they had painted two grotesque Chinese figures, with long pig-tails, clothed in green and rose-colored garments, drinking cider,—no doubt the whim of an old sailor returned from the Celestial Kingdom. . . Passing by she noticed everything; people preoccupied by the objects of their journey, always find all the details of the way much more interesting than others do.

Now, the little village was left far behind ; the further she advanced over this last promontory of Brittany, the scarcer grew the trees, and the country became more gloomy.

The ground was undulating and rocky, and from every height the far-stretching sea could be seen. No trees to be found now ; nothing but the bare ground with green furze ; and here and there the outstretched arms of the holy crucifixes silhouetted against the sky, imparting to the neighborhood an uncanny aspect.

At one of the crossways, guarded by one of those colossal figures of Christ, she hesitated between two roads running through thorny slopes.

A little child passing by came to help her out.

"Good-morning, Mademoiselle Gaud !"

She was a Gaos, a little sister of Yann. After embracing her, she asked if her parents were at home.

"Papa and Mama and the others, all but Yann," said the little girl with no malice, "who is gone to Loguivy, but I think he won't be long."

So he was not there ! Again the same bad luck, which was taking him out of her reach.

She thought of putting off her visit for some other time ; but this little girl, who had seen her, might tell about it. Then what would they think of her at Pors-Even ? So she decided to continue her way, but surely in no great hurry, and lingering on the way, to give him plenty of time to return.

When she approached Yann's village this secluded spot took more and more a desolate aspect. The sea winds, which gave vigor to men, made the plants low, dwarfish, stunted and flattened down on the hard soil. All kinds of seaweed dragged over the paths, indicating that another world was hard by. They spread in the air their salty odor.

Now and then Gaud met passers-by—sea-going men, who could be seen a long way off in this bare country, outlined, magnified against the high, distant water-line, pilots and fishermen, who seemed to be watching the sea. When she met them they greeted her. They had faces all sunburnt, and a manly and determined expression under their sailors caps.

The time did not seem to pass, and in fact, she

did not know what to do to prolong her walk. People would be astonished at seeing her move on so slowly. What could Yann be doing at Loguivy? Maybe he was flirting with the girls. . . . Ah! if she could but know how little he cared for beauties. If sometimes he happened to have any liking for one of these girls, all he had to do was to be presented. The lasses of Paimpol, as an old song of the Icelanders has it, are a little too free in their manners and cannot resist a nice young man like him. No, he had simply gone there to give an order to a basket-maker, who only in these parts could properly weave lobster-traps. At this moment he was very far from thinking of love.

She arrived at a chapel built on a height, which could be seen from a distance. It was a melancholy place, very small, and very old. A group of trees, gray and leafless, were like tresses of hair in the midst of the surrounding baldness, as if thrown on one side by an invisible hand.

And it was this same hand that wrecked the fishermen's boats,—the eternal hand of the west wind, that twists and bends all the branches of

the shore trees, away from the waves and the surge. They had grown tangled and disheveled, those old trees, curving their trunks under the pristine strength of this hand.

Gaud found herself at the end of her journey, for this was the chapel of Pors-Even; now she stopped there to gain a little more time. A small dilapidated wall ran around an enclosure strewn over with crosses. The chapel, the trees, and the graves were all of the same color. The whole place seemed uniformly blackened and eaten into by the winds from the sea; the same grayish lichen with spots of pale sulphur-yellow covered the stones, the knotty branches, and the granite saints placed in the niches of the wall.

On one of the wooden crosses a name was written in large letters: *Gaos.—Gaos, Joel, eighty years.* Ah! yes, this was the grandfather; she knew this. The sea had not wanted this old sailor. Besides, many of Yann's relatives were, naturally, sleeping in this enclosure, so she would stop here for a while; perhaps that name on the grave made a painful impression on her.

In order to spend a little more time, she en-

tered in to tell a prayer, under this old white-washed porch, all too small and worn. But there she stopped with an oppression of the heart.

Gaos ! once more that name engraved on one of the slabs erected in memory of those perished at sea.

She began to read the inscription :

To the memory of
GAOS, JEAN LOUIS,
Aged 24 years, a sailor on board the *Marguerite*,
disappeared in Iceland, the 3d of August, 1877.
May he rest in peace !

Iceland,—always Iceland !—at this entrance of the chapel everywhere were seen wooden tablets inscribed with the names of dead seamen. This was the corner reserved for the shipwrecked of Pors-Even. Filled with gloomy forebodings, she was very sorry that she came there. She had seen similar inscriptions in the church of Paimpol ; but here, in this village, the empty tombs of the Iceland fishermen were more obscure, more defaced, and wilder looking. On both sides there were stone seats for the widows and the mothers of the dead. And in this lowly place, irregular

like a grotto, there stood guarding an ancient Holy Virgin, painted in rose, with large wicked eyes resembling Cybele, the primitive goddess of the earth.

Gaos ! once more that name !

To the memory of
GAOS, FRANÇOIS,
Husband of Anne-Marie Le Goaster,
captain on board the *Paimpolais*,
lost off Iceland about the 1st or 3d of April, 1877,
with the twenty-three men composing the crew.
May they rest in peace !

And below were two crossbones, under a black skull, with green eyes, a simple and weird emblem recalling the barbarism of a bygone age.

Gaos ! everywhere that name.

Another Gaos, named Yves, *thrown overboard his vessel and disappeared in the neighborhood of the Norden-Fiord, in Iceland, at the age of twenty-two.* This slab seemed to have been fastened there for long years ; he must have been forgotten now.

While reading she felt for Yann an outburst of tenderness, not altogether free from despair.

Never, no never would he be hers! How could he be snatched from the sea where so many Gaoses were swallowed,—his ancestors and brothers who must have had great points of resemblance with him.

She entered the chapel, now already dark, being hardly lighted up by its low windows opened in the thick walls. And there, her heart ready to burst in tears, she knelt before the colossal saints, decked with common flowers, whose heads nearly touched the arches. Outside a wind just risen was moaning as if carrying on its wings home, to Brittany, the plaintive notes of dead youthful souls.

Evening was fast approaching ; so she ought to make up her mind to visit and accomplish her errand.

She went on her way, and inquiring in the village she found Gaos's house, built against a high rock, a dozen stone steps leading to it. Trembling at the thought that Yann might have returned, she crossed the little garden where chrysanthemums and veronicas grew. Entering she stated that she had brought the money, due from the

sale of the boat. They asked her politely to sit down and wait for their father, who would sign the receipt. Her eyes searched for Yann among the people in the room, but she did not see him.

They were very busy in the house. On a large white table they were cutting out, from a new piece of cotton, waterproof garments for the approaching season in Iceland.

"You see, Mademoiselle Gaud, they have to have each two suits out there."

They told her how these wretched garments were dyed, waxed, and made waterproof. While they explained everything in detail her eyes scanned over attentively this Gaos homestead. It was fixed up after the traditional manner of all Breton huts. An immense chimney-place occupied one end of the room and on each side there were beds one above another. But it was not dark and somber-looking like hovels of farmers which are always half sunk on the roadside. This was neat and snug, as the homes of seamen generally are.

Several little Gaoses were in the room, all brothers and sisters of Yann; besides these there

were two big ones who were now at sea. There was also a little fair girl, sad and neat, who did not resemble the others.

"We adopted her last year," explained the mother, "we had already enough of them, but what could we do, Mademoiselle Gaud? Her father, as you know, was one of the crew of *Maria-Dieu-t'aimé*, which perished in the Iceland sea last season. His five children, now left orphans, were taken by the neighbors, and this one fell to our lot.

Hearing herself talked about, the adopted child lowered her head down, and smiling, hid herself behind Laumec Gaos, who was her favorite.

There was an air of comfort all over the place, and the bloom of health had brightened up the rosy cheeks of the children.

They put themselves much out of the way to receive Gaud, a young *demoiselle*, whose visit was considered an honor to the family. Mounting a newly-made white staircase they led her to the room above, which was the pride of the house. She recalled the history of the building of this upper story which Yann had told her on the night

of the ball,—how Father Gaos, with his cousin, the pilot, had found an abandoned boat in the Manche, and from its proceeds this part was added to the house.

This room, the result of the wreck, was pretty and cheerful in its new coating of whitewash. There were two beds in city style curtained with rose-colored chintz, and a table in the middle of the room. From the window all Paimpol could be seen, the roadside and the Icelander vessels at anchor, and the passage through which they sail out to the open sea.

She did not dare to ask, though she wanted to know, where Yann slept. Evidently when a boy he ought to have slept down-stairs in one of the old bunks ; but now, possibly, here behind those two rose-colored curtains. She would like very much to know the details of his life, to know especially how he passed the long winter evenings. . . .

. . . A heavy step on the staircase made her tremble. No, this was not Yann, but a man, in spite of his white hair, looking very much like him who was almost of the same height and erect

as he was—it was Father Gaos returned from fishing.

After saluting her and inquiring of the object of her visit he signed the receipt which took some little time ; because, he said, his hand was not so steady now. In the meantime he would not accept this hundred francs as a final payment for the sail of the boat, but as something paid on account, and he would talk it over with M. Mével. Gaud, who did not trouble her head about money matters, smiled imperceptibly. So this was very good ; she was now quite sure that the matter had not been yet settled ; moreover, they would have further business interests with the Gaos family.

They asked her to excuse Yann for his absence from home, as if it would have been more courteous of them to receive her when all the members of the family were present. Father Gaos himself had, perhaps, guessed with the shrewdness of an old sailor that his son was not indifferent to this handsome heiress ; for he always insisted on talking about him.

"It is very strange," he said, "he is never so late ; he has gone to Loguivy, Mademoiselle Gaud,

to buy lobster-traps; lobsters being, as you may know, our great catch in the winter."

Enjoying such a good reception, she prolonged her visit, though she was aware that it was getting too late; and the thought that she would never see him, filled her heart with sadness.

"What could he be doing now, a steady man like him? Surely he has not gone to the tavern; we have no cause to worry about that. I don't mean exactly that, once in a while, on Sundays with his comrades . . . you know, Mademoiselle Gaud, the sailors. . . . Well, when one is young, why should he abstain totally? Just the same, we can say that he is steady and seldom indulges in that sort of thing."

Now night had fallen. They folded and put away the oilskin garments and stopped working. The little Gaoses and the little adopted girl, seated on the bench, were squeezing each other. Saddened by the dark hour of the evening, and looking at Gaud, they seemed to ask:

"Why don't she go now?"

With the falling twilight the fire in the chimney-place began to burn in a reddish blaze.

"You ought to stay and have soup with us, Mademoiselle Gaud."

Oh! no, she could never do that. The blood rushed to her face at the thought that she had stayed there so long. She rose and took her leave. Yann's father also rose to accompany her part of the way, as far as the lonely low land, where old trees made a dark lane.

While they walked side by side, she felt a sudden respect and tenderness for him. She would like to speak to him as to a father, in a burst of feeling which came over her; but the words stuck in her throat, and she did not say a thing.

They walked along in the cold wind of the evening which smelled of the sea, seeing, here and there, on the flat land, huts already bolted and enveloped in dark shadows,—poor nests where fishermen had taken refuge,—and coming across crucifixes, furze and stones.

How far away this Pors-Even had been and how late she was!

On the way they occasionally met people returning from Paimpol or Loguivy. Each time she saw the approach of the silhouettes of people,

she thought of Yann; but it was so easy to recognize him, even at a distance, that she was always soon undeceived. Her feet were caught in the long, dark plants, entangled like hair,—sea-weeds dragging along.

At the cross of Plouëzoch she bowed to the old man, asking him to return. The lights of Paimpol were now to be seen, so there was no further cause for fear.

Then it was all over this time. . . . And who could say now when she will see Yann. . . .

There would not be any want of pretext to visit Pors-Even again, if she could only think that her going there once more would not have such a bad appearance. She needed more courage and more boldness; if only her little confidant, Sylvestre, had still been there. Perhaps she would have asked him to go and find Yann in order to get an explanation from him. But he was away now and who knows for how many years? . . .

CHAPTER IV.

"MARRY?" had said Yann to his parents that same evening, "me marry? and then, good heavens, why should I? Is it because I can ever be happier than here with you, with no care, no quarrels with anybody, and the good soup all hot, every evening on my return from the sea. . . . Oh! I understand all; the question is that somebody has been to our house to-day. In the first place what a girl so rich can want of poor people like us is beyond my understanding, and then, neither she nor another; no, this has been all thought over, that I shan't get married and that is my decision."

The two old Gaoses, sorely disappointed, looked at each other silently; for after talking it over together they were quite sure that this young girl would not refuse their handsome Yann. But they did not try to insist on it, knowing how useless it would be. His mother specially lowered

her head down and did not speak another word. She respected the fancies of her eldest son, almost considered the head of the family. Although he was very gentle and tender with her, more submissive than a child in the small affairs of life, he had been, for a long time, absolute master in great ones, opposing every pressure with a quiet and fierce independence.

He never sat up late having, like every fisherman, the habit of getting up before daylight; and after supper, at eight o'clock having cast a last look of satisfaction at his new traps and the new nets from Loguivy, he began to undress, apparently with a tranquil mind. Then he went to sleep in his bed curtained by pink chintz, which he shared with his brother Laumec.

CHAPTER V.

For a fortnight Gaud's little confidant, Sylvestre, had been staying in the barracks of Brest. Very homesick, yet very gentle, haughtily wearing his blue open collar, and the cap with red tuft, elegant after the style of a sailor with his rolling pace and high stature; at heart always regretting his good old grandmother and always keeping the same old innocent heart of a child.

One night he got drunk with his village companions, for that was the custom. They had returned to their barracks, all in a band, embracing each other and singing with all their might.

One Sunday they had been to a theater, taking seats in the upper gallery, where they played a melodrama when the sailors, exasperated against the traitor, had assailed him with a *Hos*, all in a body making a racket like that of the west wind. Moreover, they had found the place very hot,

where they needed more air and more room ; an attempt to take off his big coat brought down on him a shower of reprimands from the officer ; at last he fell asleep.

On his way to the barracks he had encountered some women of ripe age, bareheaded, walking on the pavements.

"Look here, nice fellow," they accosted him with hoarse voices.

He understood what they wanted, not being so simple as one would think ; but the memory of his grandmother and Marie Gaos suddenly recalled made him pass scornfully by them casting a glance full of childlike mockery from his lofty position of beauty and youth. They were amazed, these beauties, at the shyness of this sailor.

"Have you seen the like!" . . . "Take care, save yourself, my boy, run quick, somebody will eat you." And the sound of wicked words, which they shouted after him was lost in indistinct clamor, filling the streets on that Sunday night.

He behaved in Brest as he had done in Iceland and on the sea, always remaining pure ; but

his comrades did not make fun of him for his moral strength,—something that always inspires the sailors with respect.

One day they called him to the bureau of his regiment to announce to him that he was ordered to China to serve in the Formosa squadron ! . . . He had been expecting this for some time, being informed by those able to read the papers that out there the war would not come soon to an end. On account of the pressing orders to depart at once, he was not allowed the usual permission accorded to those starting on a campaign, to visit their friends and take leave of them. In five days he must finish his preparations for departure. It caused him a good deal of anxiety,—the charm of the long voyage, of the unknown, and of war ; also the anguish of leaving behind everything with the uncertainty, of not coming back.

A thousand thoughts whirled in his head. In the barrack-rooms they made enough noise, many others also being ordered to join the same Chinese squadron. Squatting on the floor he quickly scribbled a few lines to his poor old grandmother,

with a pencil, alone, in an agitated reverie, in the midst of all the comings and goings and the noises of the young men who were also to depart like him.

CHAPTER VII.

"She is rather old, this sweetheart of his!" were telling the others two days afterwards, laughing behind his back. "However, they seem to get along fine, all the same."

It amused them to see him for the first time walk through the streets of Recouvrance with a woman at his side, like everybody else, and leaning towards her with a tender look telling her things which seemed to be very sweet.

She was a small person, with a lively figure seen from behind, with a skirt rather short for the fashion of the day, a small brown shawl and a high Paimpol head-dress.

She, also, hanging on his arm, looked up to him with an affectionate glance.

"She is rather old, this sweetheart!"

They said this without any malice, seeing very well that she was his good old grandma, come up from the country.

She had come in haste, filled suddenly with terror at the news of the departure of her grandson,—for this Chinese war had already cost Paimpol many seamen.

Having scraped together all her poor little savings, she had put on her Sunday dress, taking an extra cap in a pasteboard box, and started off in order to kiss him, at least once more.

She went straight to the barracks to ask for him. At first the adjutant refused to let him come out.

"If you want to have him, my good woman, go and see the captain, there he is passing."

She went immediately to him. He was touched by her story.

"Send Moan to change his clothes," he said, and Moan hurried up, four steps at a time, to put on his best clothes,—in the meanwhile the good old woman was making inimitable grimaces and courtesyed behind the adjutant's back.

When her grandson reappeared, dressed in his low-necked uniform, she was amazed to find him so handsome. His black beard was pointed after the fashion then in vogue among sailors. The

ruffles of his opened shirt were frilled and the long ribbons of his cap floated, ornamented with gold anchors at the end. For a moment she imagined that she had before her her son Pierre, who also twenty years ago had been topman in the fleet. And the remembrance of this past, left long since behind, and the memory of the dead ones, cast furtively a melancholy shadow on the present hour.

Her sadness was quickly dispersed. They went out, arm in arm, happy, being together. It was then that people taking her for his sweetheart had passed the judgment that she was "rather ancient."

She had taken him to dinner to an inn kept by Paimpol people, which had been recommended to her as not very high-priced.

Afterwards, always arm in arm, they walked along in Brest, gazing at the show windows. There was nothing so amusing as all that she found to make this grandson laugh, talking always in the Paimpol dialect, which could not be understood by the passers-by.

CHAPTER VIII.

She stayed with him three days, three joyful days over which there weighed a gloomy morrow.

At last the hour of parting came, when she had to return to Ploubazlanec. First, because her money was exhausted, and then, Sylvestre was to sail the next day but one, and the sailors were kept closely in their quarters on the eve of starting on important voyages (a custom, though at first sight seeming barbaric, which is a necessary precaution against those who have a tendency to dissipate at the last moment).

Oh, that last day! . . . She tried hard enough to search her brain for some more amusing stories to tell her grandson, but she tried in vain. No, only her tears kept on trickling down her eyes; and sobs were choking her. Hanging on his arm, she had given him all sorts of advices and these made him wish to weep.

At last they entered a church to tell their

prayers together. She went away on the evening train. For economy's sake, they walked to the station ; he carrying her pasteboard box and supporting her on his arm, over which she leaned with all her weight. She was tired and weary, this poor old woman. She could bear no more, after all she had gone through during the last three or four days. Under her brown shawl her back was all bent, unable to find strength to straighten herself up ; she had no longer any trace of youth in her figure ; she felt heavily the overwhelming weight of her sixty-six years. At the thought that all was to end, that in a few minutes they were to part from each other, her heart broke with anguish. And he was going to China, off to that place of carnage ! She still had him with her ; she still was holding him with her poor hands, . . . nevertheless they were to part ; no, all her desires, all her tears and the despair of a grandmother were of no avail to keep him ! . . .

Embarrassed with her ticket, her basket of provisions, her mittens, all agitated, trembling, she was giving him her last counsels, to which he re-

plied in a low voice with a submissive *yes,* his head bent towards her, gazing at her with his gentle sweet look and childlike manner.

"Come on, old woman, you must make up your mind whether you are going or not!"

The engine whistled. Seized by a sudden fear of losing her train, she lifted with both hands her box,—then dropping it to the ground, she took hold of him by the neck in a supreme embrace.

A good many people were looking at them in the station, but this time they did not feel like laughing. Pushed along by the porters, worn out, bewildered, she threw herself into the first compartment she came to, and they rudely closed the door behind her, while he started off with the easy gait of a sailor, describing a circle like a flying bird, in order to make a short cut to reach the gate outside the station in time to get another glimpse of her.

A shrill whistle, a rattling roll of the wheels,—and his grandmother was passing by. He leaning against the gate waved with a youthful grace his cap, with its ribbons fluttering; and

she, hanging out of the window of a third-class carriage, made signs with her handkerchief so as he could see her easily. As long as she was able to distinguish that blue and black figure who was her grandson, she followed him with her eyes and with all her soul wished him "Au revoir," which is quite uncertain when addressed to a departing sailor.

Look at him well, poor old woman! at your little Sylvestre, follow his fleeting figure to the last minute, which will disappear there forever. . . .

When she could see him no longer, she fell back in her seat, careless about crushing her new head-dress, weeping and sobbing, in the agonies of death. . . .

He had returned back slowly, with his head bent, big drops of tears rolling down his cheeks. The autumn night had fallen, the gas was lighted everywhere, and the festivities of the sailors begun. Paying no attention to all about him he passed through Brest and crossing the bridge of Recouvrance, returned to the barracks.

"Look here, my handsome fellow," called out

to him the hoarse voices of women, who had already began their promenade on the sidewalks.

He went in and lay on his hammock, crying all alone, hardly closing his eyes till morning.

CHAPTER IX.

. . . . . .

He was now on the ocean, having swiftly crossed unknown seas, much bluer than that of Iceland.

The vessel which carried him off to the further ends of Asia had orders to hurry along without putting in ports they passed on the way.

Already he felt that he was far away from home now, for the ship was speeding on continuously, incessantly, regardless of the wind and the sea. Being topman, he passed all his time up in the rigging, perched there like a bird, shunning the soldiers packed on deck,—that mob down below.

They had stopped only twice, on the shores of Tunis, to take on board zouaves and mules. He had noticed from a distance, white cities on the sands and on the crests of hills. He even came down from the top to have a look at the dusky men, clothed in white cotton cloth, who had come

on board to sell fruit; his companions told him that these were the Bedouins.

In spite of the autumn, this heat and sunlight continued, and gave him the impression of being very far from home.

One day they came to a city called Port-Said. All the flags of Europe floated on top of long staffs, giving to the whole place the appearance of a festive Babel, all being encircled by the reflecting sands, vast like a sea. They anchored there, near the quay, almost in the midst of the long streets of wooden houses. He had never seen the outside world so near and so real; the number and the movements of the boats distracted him.

With a continuous noise of whistles and of steam sirens, all these vessels ran into a long sort of a canal straight as a trench and vanished in the endless sandy wastes in a silvery line.

From his lofty position he saw them file as in a procession and disappear on the plains.

On this quay every kind of costumes were moving about; men dressed with garments of every color, busy crying amid this rush of transit. In the evening there was added to the diabolical

whistle of the engines, the confused sounds of several orchestras, playing clamorous tunes to mitigate the heart-breaking regrets of all exiles who filed past.

The next day, at early dawn, they also sailed up that narrow ribbon of waters between the sands, vessels of every country following in their train. This procession through the desert lasted two days, then there opened another sea before them, and now they were in the open.

They always sailed at full speed. The surface of this warmer sea was streaked in red, and sometimes the seething foam left in the ship's wake had the color of blood. He passed most of his time up in the riggings, singing all alone in a low voice "Jean-François de Nantes," thus recalling his brother Yann, Iceland, and the good old times.

Sometimes, in the distant fields of mirage, mountains of unusual colorings would appear to him. Those steering the ship doubtless knew, in spite of their remoteness and dimness, that these were only promontories, which stretched like landmarks on the great high-roads of the world. But the topman sails just like a bale of merchandise,

understanding nothing, ignorant of the distance and measurements of that never-ending expanse.

He had the notion of only one thing, that of getting away; the distance hopelessly increasing every day. And he had a very clear idea of this when he would look from above over the track of the ship foaming, swift, and stretching backwards; then he figured to himself how long this motion would last, never seeming to relax night and day.

Down below, on the deck, the crowd massed in the shade of the tents were panting for breath. The water, the atmosphere, and the sun had put on a dejected and humiliating splendor. The eternal carnival of these objects were perhaps meant as irony for the ephemeral, organized existences. . . .

Once he was much amused watching from his perch the swarms of birds, of an unknown species, flying over the vessel, like a whirlwind of black dust. They allowed themselves to be caught and caressed, being quite fatigued. All the topmen had a few on their shoulders.

But soon the most exhausted began to die.

Thousands of these little things died on the yards, on the portholes, in the terrible sun of the Red Sea.

Driven by a violent wind they had flown over trackless deserts, and being in deadly terror of falling down exhausted in the blue waves all around, with a last effort they had dropped on this vessel.

Yonder, in the depths of the far-away regions of Libya their race had multiplied in exuberant love. Their race had multiplied in dwelling numbers and there were enough of them; now, blind and ruthless Mother Nature was, with her breath pursuing this excess of tiny birds with the same cold blood as once she had done to a generation of men.

And they were dying on the heated ironworks of the ship; the deck was strewn with their little bodies, which but yesterday were beating with life, song, and love. . . .

Sylvestre and the other topmen gathered these black little tatters of feathers all wet, opening in their hands their blue-tinted wings with a commiserating look, and they flung them into the

great nothingness of the sea with a sweep of the broom. . . .

Sometimes clouds of locusts, perhaps descendants of those of Moses, passed and the vessel was covered with them.

Then for several days they sailed on the monotonous blue, where no living thing was to be seen, if one can except the fish shining on the face of waters. . . .

CHAPTER X.

. . . THE rain pouring down in torrents under a leaden sky—such was India. Being appointed to be one of the crew of a whaler, Sylvestre had just set his foot in this land.

Through the thick foliage the warm showers fell upon him while he looked at the strange sights around him. Everywhere was magnificently green ; the tree-leaves were like big feathers ; and the men walking there had nice velvety eyes, which seemed to close by the weight of the eyelids. The wind driving the rain smelled of musk and flowers. Some women beckoned to him ; which was very much like the "Look here, my handsome fellow" that he had heard so many times in Brest. But in this enchanted land their call was perplexing and made his flesh quiver. Their superb bosoms swelled under transparent muslin ; they were tawny and polished like bronze.

Though hesitating, but fascinated, he took a few steps to follow them. . . .

. . . But a shrill whistle from the ship, modulated like the thrills of a bird, suddenly called him back to the whaler, which was ready to sail. He ran away,—and farewell to these Indian beauties. When he was out at sea that evening he felt his heart beat as a child's.

After another week of the blue sea they touched another country of rain and verdure. A gang of small, noisy, yellow men crowded the deck of the vessel, bringing baskets of coal.

"Have we arrived already in China?" asked Sylvestre, seeing so many grotesque figures with pigtails.

No, not yet; a little more patience; this was only Singapore. He climbed up to his perch to escape the black dust blown over by the wind, when hundreds of baskets of coal were being hastily emptied in the bunkers.

At last they arrived at a place called Tourane, where the *Circé* was at anchor blockading the coast. This was the vessel to which he knew he had been assigned, so he boarded her with his bag.

There he met some of his countrymen, two Icelanders, who were gunners, for the time being. In the warm and quiet evenings when they had nothing else to do they came together on the bridge, apart from the others, to form a little Brittany of memories.

He was to pass five months of inaction and exile in that melancholy bay, before the long-expected moment of fighting arrived.

CHAPTER XI.

. . . . . .

In Paimpol, the last day of February, the day before the departure of the fishermen for Iceland, Gaud was standing against the door of her room, motionless and very pale. Yann was down-stairs talking with her father. She had seen him come in and she could indistinctly hear his voice. They had not met during the whole winter, as if a fatality was keeping them apart.

After her walk to Pors-Even she had looked forward with hope to the day of the fête of *pardon*, held for the Icelanders, when there are so many opportunities to see each other, talk together, on the square, in groups, during the evening. But on the morning of that fête-day, when already the streets were decorated with white buntings and decked with green garlands, there began to pour down torrents of rain, driven from the west

by a howling wind. The sky had never been so darkened before in Paimpol.

"Well, they won't come over from Ploubazlanec now," sadly said the lasses who had sweethearts living there. And truly they did not come, and perhaps they were crowding the taverns now.

There had been no processions nor strolls. She sat all the evening at her window, gloomier than ever, listening to the water splashing over the roofs, and to the noisy songs of fishermen rising from the taverns.

She had foreseen, for some time, this visit of Yann, feeling surely that Father Gaos would send his son to terminate the unsettled business of the sale of the boat, being unwilling to come to Paimpol himself. She had decided to go straight to him,—so unusual a thing for a girl to do,—and speak to him frankly, and thus come to a clear understanding. She would reproach him of having fascinated her with his charms, and then abandoned her like a dishonorable fellow. Obstinacy and a wild nature, attachment to the sea or the fear of being refused . . . if these were

the only obstacles, as hinted by Sylvestre, they might disappear, perhaps, after a few frank words between them. And then, perhaps, his fond smile might reappear, which would smooth everything,—the same smile which had bewitched and surprised her the winter before, on a certain night of a ball, when they waltzed for hours, his arms around her. This hope gave her new courage, filled her with a sweet impatience.

In her imagination everything seemed so easy, so simple to say and to do. By chance this visit of Yann was made at a fortunate hour. She was quite sure that her father, lounging and smoking at that moment, would not trouble himself to see Yann out. In the corridor, where nobody could see them, she would succeed at last to have an explanation from him.

But now that the time had come, such a step seemed to her very bold. Even the idea of meeting him, face to face, at the foot of those stairs, made her tremble all over, and her heart beat as if it would break. . . . And to think that any moment the door below might open,—with that small squeak she knew so well.—to let him out !

No, assuredly, she would never dare, rather she would pine away with expectation or die of grief than attempt such a thing. Already she took a few steps back to regain her seat and to work.

But she stopped again, hesitating and distracted, recalling that to-morrow was the day of their sailing for Iceland, and this opportunity might be the last. If she missed it she must again pass months of solitude and waiting, longing for his return, and sacrifice another summer of her life. . . .

Below, the door opened,—Yann was coming out! With a sudden resolution she hurried down the stairs and stood trembling before him.

"Monsieur Yann, I would like to speak to you, if you will."

"To me! . . . Mademoiselle Gaud?" . . . he said lowering his voice and touching his hat.

He looked at her with his bright eyes in a wild manner, his head thrown back, with a hard expression seeming to ask if he ought to stop there at all.

He leaned his massive shoulders against the wall so as not to be so close to her in this narrow passage where he found himself caught.

Petrified for a moment, every word that she had meant to tell him failed her now; she had not foreseen the possibility of such an affront,—him passing without even stopping to listen to her.

"Are you so afraid of our house, Monsieur Yann?" she asked in a dry and strange voice,—all so different in tone from what she had wished to have.

He turned his eyes away, looking outside; his cheeks were all red, a rush of blood seemed to burn his face; his mobile nostrils dilated with every breath, following the movements of his heart like those of the bulls.

She tried to continue:

"On that night of the ball the way you took your leave of me made me think that you were not indifferent to me. . . . Monsieur Yann, then you must have lost all memory. . . . What have I done to you? . . .

Unfortunately the west wind blowing in from

the street ruffled Yann's hair and waved the tassels of Gaud's headdress, slamming the door furiously behind them. This was a bad place to discuss so serious a subject. After these first few sentences choking in her throat, Gaud stood silent, feeling dizzy and unable to think of anything. They advanced towards the street door, he always trying to get away.

Outside the wind was still making a terrible noise, and the sky was enveloped in darkness, a cheerless and livid light flashed full on their features through the open door. A neighbor was looking at them from across the street.

"What can they be talking, these two, in that corridor, with faces so troubled? What's now going on at Mévels?"

"No, Mademoiselle Gaud," he answered at last, freeing himself with the ease of a reindeer. "I have already heard that people gossip about us. . . . No, Mademoiselle Gaud, you are so rich, we are not of the same class. I am not the man to visit your house . . . I . . ."

And he went out. . . .

So everything was at an end now, at an end forever. And she had left unsaid all the things she had wanted to tell him in that interview which only served to make her appear in his eyes as a bold girl. . . . Then what sort of a fellow was this Yann with his contempt for women, contempt for money, contempt for everything! . . .

At first she stood nailed to her place, her head in a whirl, every object seeming to dance about her.

And then, a thought more intolerable than the rest came to her like the flash of lightning, that Yann's companions had been loitering on the square, waiting for him, and that perhaps he had gone to tell them what just had happened, making fun of her. What else could be a more odious affront upon her!

She quickly went up-stairs to her room to watch through the curtains. . . . In front of the house she really saw a gang of these men, but they were simply looking at the sky, which had grown darker and darker, and were making conjectures about the menacing rain.

"It will be only a shower; let us go in and have a drink, till it clears off."

Then they made jokes on Jeannie Caroff and other local beauties; but nobody turned the head towards her window.

They were all gay, with the exception of one who neither talked nor laughed, but remained sad and grave. He did not go in to drink with the rest. And not minding them or the falling rain, but walking slowly under the shower, like one plunged in a deep reverie, he crossed the square and took the road to Ploubazlanec.

She had already forgiven him, and a hopeless feeling of tenderness succeeded to the bitter vexation that had found entrance to her heart.

She sat down, her head between her hands. What could she do at present? Oh! if he had only listened to her but for a minute! And if he could only come now to her room where they could talk quietly, possibly everything might be explained yet.

She loved him enough to dare to say so in his face. She would have told him: "You sought me when I didn't ask anything of you. Now I

belong to you with all my soul if you but wish to have me. Look! I am not scared of becoming a fisherman's wife; and yet among the Paimpol boys if I like one for a husband I need but choose him. But I love only you, for in spite of everything I think you are the best of all young men. I am a little rich, I know that I am pretty; though I have lived in cities I am sure that I an a well-behaved girl, having never done anything wrong. Since I love you so, why will you not accept me?"

. . . But these found utterance only in dreams. It was too late. Yann would never listen to her. A second attempt to talk to him! . . . No! never! what kind of a creature would he take her for then! She would rather die!

And to-morrow they were to depart for Iceland! A whitish February light gleamed into her room, where, cold and lonely, she threw herself on one of the seats along the wall. She imagined the whole world, the present things, and the things to come, to sink and vanish in that gloomy and dreadful void now being formed about her.

She wished herself released from the burden of

life and rest under a stone with the sleep of death! to suffer no longer! . . . And now she truly forgave him, and no hatred mingled with the hopeless love she had for him. . . .

CHAPTER XII.

. . . . . .

THE sea, the gray sea.

Along the trackless highroad, which leads the fishermen every summer to Iceland, Yann was gently gliding all that day.

The day before, when they had set out chanting the old hymns, a south wind was briskly blowing, and all the vessels with their outspread sails dispersed like sea gulls.

But soon that breeze had subsided and their speed slackened. Great banks of fog moved over the watery surface. Yann was more silent than usual. He complained of the calm weather, and seemed anxious to have some kind of exciting work to drive away from his head depressing thoughts. However, there was nothing for him to do, but tranquilly glide along in the midst of tranquil objects, only to breathe and to live.

Nothing could be seen but dark gray masses; nothing to be heard but silence. . . .

. . . Suddenly a dull, hardly perceptible, but unusual sound was heard as if coming from below with a grinding sensation, like that felt in a carriage when the brake is pressed on the wheels!

The *Marie* ceased to move and stood motionless. They had run aground!! Where and upon what? Probably on a rock on the English coast; for since the fall of the night they had seen nothing, with thick curtains of mist around them. Everybody ran and rushed about. Their excited movements made such a contrast to the sudden deadly stillness of their vessel! The *Marie* had come to a standstill at that spot and did not move. In the midst of that watery expanse, which in this foggy weather did not seem to have any stability, she was caught by an unknown and immutable power, hidden under the waves; she was fairly in its grip and was perhaps doomed to die there.

Who has not seen some poor bird, some poor fly, caught by the feet in bird-lime. At first scarcely anything is perceived, nothing changed

in their condition ; and they have yet to know that they were caught from underneath, and in danger of being unable to be free again.

It is while struggling to extricate themselves that the sticking stuff soils their wings, their heads, and then, little by little, they assume the pitiful look of a creature in distress and about to die.

Such was the case with the *Marie*. At first, it did not seem so serious ; it is true she was leaning on one side, but being broad daylight, and the weather so calm how could they be uneasy that the danger was imminent, unless they had positive knowledge of the fact.

The captain was to be pitied, because it was his mistake that he did not give enough attention to the vessel's whereabouts ; he wrung his hands in the air saying :

"Ma Doué ! ma Doué !" in a tone of despair.

When the fog lifted they saw very near to them a headland which they did not recognize, and soon, the fog covering it again they could no longer see it.

Moreover, there was no sail, no smoke to be

seen, and they rather have it so, for they were in dread of the English lifeboats' crew who come to save you after their own way, and you have to defend yourself as against pirates.

They bustled about, moving around and turning upside down the stowage. Their dog, Turc, who was never afraid of the motion of the vessel, was very much excited by this accident; the rumblings coming from below, the rough jerks when the waves passed, and the sudden arrest of the vessel's movement, made him think that this was something very strange; and he hid himself in a corner, his tail between his legs.

Afterward, they lowered the boats to cast anchor to try to free the vessel, uniting their strengths together on the cables—a hard job which lasted full ten hours. At nightfall this vessel, all trim and smart in the morning, was in a sorry plight, swamped, soiled, and disabled! Tossed about on all sides she struggled hard, but still she remained there fixed like a lifeless boat.

. . . . . .

Night now overtook them; a wind had risen and the waves swelled higher and higher; this

was bad. Suddenly, about six o'clock they were set free and were off again ; they cut the cables which were holding it steady. . . . Then men were rushing over the deck from one end to the other shouting :

"We are afloat !"

They were really afloat ! but how to describe the joy of moving forward again, becoming once more buoyant and full of life, instead of the wreck they seemed to be a moment before !

Yann's sadness also vanished. Buoyed like the boat, and cured by the healthy fatigue of his arms, he had regained his careless manner, shaken off his reveries.

The next morning when they had finished hauling in the anchors, he continued his way to cold Iceland, his heart, to all appearance, as light as in the earliest years of his life.

CHAPTER XIII.

. . . . . .

At the other end of the earth, on board the *Circé*, at anchor in the roadstead of Ha-Long, they were distributing the mail from France. In the midst of a crowd of sailors, the purser called out in a loud voice the names of the happy recipients of letters. This was taking place in the evening, in the battery, where they were jostling one another around a funnel.

"Sylvestre Moan!" There was a letter for him bearing the postmark of Paimpol, but the handwriting was not that of Gaud. What could this mean? Who could have written it? Scanning it over and over, he opened it, fearing to hear something bad.

"Ploubazlanec, *March* 5, 1884.

"My dear Grandson,—"

It was from his old grandmother, so he felt

better. She herself had attached at the bottom her signature learned by heart, but unsteady and like a schoolgirl's : "Widow Moan."

"Widow Moan!" with a spontaneous movemen he lifted it to his lips and kissed that name as an amulet. Because it had reached him at a critical moment in his life,—early the next day he was going to face the enemy's fire.

It was in the middle of April; Bac Ninh and Hong Hoa had been captured. No important engagement was near at hand in Tonkin,—yet the arriving reinforcements were not sufficient, so sailors were taken from all the ships, all that could be spared, to fill up the naval regiments already disembarked. And Sylvestre, who was languishing a long time on board the cruiser, in this dull blockade, was assigned with a few others to take the place of those missing from the regiment. Indeed at the time there was some talk about peace, but something was telling that they were to go on shore in time to have a little fight. Arranging their bags, finishing their preparations, and bidding "good-by" they walked up and down all the night near those sleeping

quietly. They felt elated and lively by the side of those staying behind. Each one had his peculiar way of showing his view about the departure. Some grave and a little meditating, while others were bursting out in exuberant expressions. Sylvestre was silent and impatiently waiting to set out, and when somebody looked at him, his repressed smile seemed to say: "I am really one of them, one to take part in to-morrow morning's fight."

As yet he had a very vague idea of war and battle; but that specially fascinated him because he was the scion of a valiant race.

. . . Anxious about Gaud on account of the strange handwriting he came near a lantern to read the letter. This was a pretty hard thing to do, having all around him groups of half-naked men who also in the stifling heat of the battery were pressing close to the light to read their letters. As he had foreseen, in the beginning of the letter, Grandma Yvonne had explained why she had been obliged to have recourse to the inexperienced hand of an old neighbor:

"My dear Child,—I could not have your cousin write to you for me this time; because she is in a deep sorrow. Her father suddenly died two days ago. It seems that he had gone through the whole of his fortune, by unsuccessful speculations made in Paris the preceding winter, so his house had to be sold with the furniture. This is something that nobody expected in Paimpol. I imagine, my dear child, that this news will give you great pain, as it has done to me. Son Gaos sends his hearty greetings to you. He has renewed his engagement with Captain Guermeur, still on the same vessel. They left for Iceland rather early this year. They set sail the first of this month, two days before poor Gaud's misfortune. So they know nothing about it.

"But you can very well imagine that for the present everything is all over and we shall not celebrate their wedding; for she'll have to work now for her living. . . ."

. . . He was overwhelmed with this bad news which entirely spoiled the joy of going to battle.

PART THIRD.

CHAPTER I.

. . . . . .

. . . A BULLET whistles through the air! . . . Sylvestre stops short to listen. . . .

It is on a vast plain carpeted in green with the velvety verdure of spring. The sky is gray and lowering.

They are six armed sailors reconnoitering among the rice-fields in a muddy pathway . . .

. . . Again! . . . this same whizz in the still air!—a shrill and humming sound like a prolonged *dzinn* giving the impression of a little wicked thing swiftly and straight passing by, whose touch might be fatal.

For the first time in his life Sylvestre was hearing this music. The balls that come towards you sound different than those you fire off yourself.

The far-off report is attenuated, no longer heard, so you easily distinguish the humming of the metal as it swiftly rushes by, almost grazing your ears. . . .

. . . And *dzinn*, *dzinn*, again and again! A shower of balls pouring now, and they stop short very near the sailors, burying themselves in the inundated soil of the rice-fields, each with a dry and rapid sound of falling hail or splashing of water.

They looked at each other, laughing as if watching a comically played farce, and said :

"The Chinese!" (To the sailors the Annamites, Tonquinites, Black Flags,—all belong to the same Chinese family.)

How can be expressed the disdain, the old mocking rancor, or the eagerness to rush to battle, which they put in their tone of calling "The Chinese!"

Two or three more balls whistling past grazing the ground ; they could be seen rebounding like grasshoppers over the green. This slight shower of lead did not last very long, and soon entirely ceased ; absolute silence now reigns over the vast green plain ; nothing stirs about.

All six are still watching with keen eyes, sniffing the breeze, wondering whence all this came. Assuredly from yonder clump of bamboos appearing like an island of feathers in the plain, behind which were seen half hidden, angular houses. Now they made a run towards these, their feet sliding or getting buried in the soft soil of the rice-fields.

Sylvestre, with his long and agile legs, runs ahead of the others.

No more whistling of bullets now, or they must have been dreaming. . . .

And as in every part of the world certain things are always and eternally the same,—the gray of the clouded heavens, the fresh colorings of the fields in spring,—one might almost have imagined to see now the meadows of Florence, and the young men running about gaily, playing quite a different game than that of death.

But on approaching nearer, the bamboos show better the exotic beauty of their foliage; the strange curves of the roofs are more clearly defined; and the yellow men, lying behind in ambush, advance to have a peep at them, their faces

distorted with malice and fear. . . . Suddenly they rush out and array themselves in a long line, trembling but determined and dangerous.

"The Chinese!" murmured the sailors again with the same brave smile.

But this time they find that there are many of them—too many of them. And one of the company turning back saw some others issuing from behind the trees. . . .

. . . . . .

. . . He was so handsome at that moment, on that day, this little Sylvestre; his old grandmother would have been in raptures at sight of such a warrior!

He was very much altered during the last few days,—his face all bronzed, his voice changed, he seemed to be in his own element there. At a moment of supreme indecision the sailors, scratched by the balls, had made a movement as if retreating, which would have resulted in the death of all; but Sylvestre had kept on advancing. Holding his gun by the barrel, attacking a whole group, he knocked them down right and left with stunning blows from the butt-end. Thanks

to him the things took another turn now. The panic, the madness which in these small leaderless battles decide the fate of the day, passed now to the ranks of the Chinese,—they were the ones who retreated.

. . . It was soon over now ; they were fleeing. The six sailors reloading their guns were shooting them down at their ease ; red pools of blood were formed in the grass ; mutilated bodies lay all around, the brains emptying out of the skull into the water of the rice-fields.

They were fleeing, all bent over, crouching over on the ground like leopards. Sylvestre was pursuing them, already wounded twice,—in the thigh by a thrust of the lance, and a deep gash in his arm. But only stirred by the intoxication of fighting, that unreasoning intoxication of a vigorous blood which gives a lofty courage to the simple, and created the heroes of antiquity.

One whom he was pursuing turned back to fire at him in an impulse of despairing terror. Sylvestre stopped, smiling, scornful, sublime, to let him fire, and seeing the direction in which it was aimed, he shifted a little to the left ; but by the

movement of the trigger the barrel of the Chinaman's gun deviated in the same direction. All at once he felt a rapping sensation on his breast; by a flash of thought he understood very well what that was, before he felt any pain,—then turned back to the others who were following him to tell them with an effort the consecrated phrase, like an old soldier: "I think it's all up with me!" As a result of his run he took a long breath to refill his lungs through the mouth, but he felt the air rush in also by a hole in the breast with a gurgling, reminding of a broken bellows. At the same time his mouth was filled with blood; he felt a sharp pain at his side, which rapidly grew worse and worse, until it became something exasperating and unspeakable.

He turned two or three times, his head in a vertigo, gasping through all the red liquid that choked him, and then he fell over heavily in the mud.

. . . . . .

About two weeks later when the sky was getting darkened at the approach of the rainy season, and the weather was growing warmer in Yellow

Tonkin, Sylvestre, first taken to Hamoï, was now sent to the roadstead of Ha-Long and placed on board a hospital-ship about to return to France.

For a long time he had been carried about on litters, at times resting in ambulances. They had done all that could be done ; but under such bad conditions his chest had been filled with water on the wounded side, and the air entered in a gurgling sound through the hole that would never close.

The military medal awarded to him gave him a momentary joy.

But he was no longer the former warrior with a determined gait, and a short, sonorous voice. All these had dwindled away with the long suffering and enervating fever. Being homesick, he had become once more the child ; he scarcely spoke now, answering only with a small gentle voice, hardly audible. To feel so sick and to be so far away ! To think that he had to travel so many long days before he could reach home ! How could he hope to live till then with his daily diminishing strength ? . . . This dreadful sense of distance pressed on his mind at every awak-

ing, after a few hours of drowsiness,—to awake to the acute pain of his wounds, to the heat of his fever and the small blowing sound of his torn breast! He had implored them to take him on board at all hazards.

He was very heavy to be borne on stretchers, so carrying him they involuntarily gave him some hard jerks.

On board this transport about to depart, they placed him in one of the iron bedsteads, fixed the same way as in hospitals; and then he started on his long voyage home across the seas. But this time, instead of living like a bird up in the full wind of his nest of a topman, he remained in the close atmosphere of below stairs, amid the exhalations of medicines, wounds and misery.

The first days the joy of being on his way home had done him some good. He would sit up in his bed reclining on the pillows and from time to time would ask for his box. The box of a sailor is made of white wood which they buy in Paimpol to put their valuables in. In this box he kept the letters of Grandma Yvonne with those of Yann and Gaud, a copy-book of sea

songs, and a book of Confucius in Chinese, picked up by chance in a pillage, on whose blank leaves he had written the simple journal of his campaign.

However, the wound did not get any better; from the first week the doctors despaired of his life.

. . . They were now near the equator, in the excessive heat of storms. The transport sailed onward, shaking the beds, the wounds, and the patients,—she sped along on a tempestuous sea, tossed about by destructive monsoons.

Since they left Ha-Long more than one patient had died and was thrown into the deep sea on this high road to France; a number of these narrow beds had been disencumbered of their suffering occupants.

On this particular day the moving hospital had a very gloomy aspect; on account of the high seas they had been obliged to close the iron shutters of the port-holes, which made the already foul air of the place still more sickening.

He was getting worse; the end was coming. Lying always on his wounded side he pressed his

hands on it with his remaining strength, to prevent the watery and liquid decomposition from moving in the right lung, and tried to breathe only with the other. But this left one was gradually affected by the other; and the supreme anguish began.

His diseased brain was haunted by all sorts of visions of home; in the warm darkness he saw beloved or frightful forms bending over him; in a continuous hallucination he dreamed of Brittany and Iceland.

In the morning he had asked for the priest, a very old man accustomed to see sailors die, who was surprised to find behind the manly figure of this young man, the innocence of a child.

He called for air, for fresh air; but it was nowhere to be found, the ventilators did not give any. The nurse was fanning him all the time with a fan all covered with Chinese flowers; but this only served to stir the rank vapors, the foul atmosphere already breathed a hundred times over and which was repulsive to the lungs.

Sometimes he was possessed with the madness of jumping out of his bed, when he felt so near

the approaching death, and going up on deck to inhale the breeze to try to get new life. . . . Oh! if he could only run about in the riggings like the rest, and once more climb up the masts! . . . But all these great efforts ended only in the lifting of his head and feeble neck very much like the incomplete movements that one makes while asleep.—No, he was no longer able to do it; he fell back in the same hollows of his crumbled bed, already stuck there fast by death. And each time after the fatigue of a similar shock, for a minute he would lose consciousness of everything.

To please him they finally opened one of the port-holes, although it was still dangerous, the storm not being entirely passed. This was in the evening towards one o'clock. When the iron shutter was opened it gave only entrance to a red dazzling light. Through a rent in the sky the setting sun appeared on the horizon in a glorious splendor. Its blending rays extending over the rolling waves, illumined this floating hospital, which looked like a swinging torch.

Still they did not have any air, and the little that there was outside was powerless to enter

there and drive away the smell of fever. Everywhere in this infinite equatorial sea the atmosphere was impregnated with a tepid humidity and an irrespirable close air.

No air anywhere, not even for the dying, who lay panting for breath.

. . . One last vision agitated him very much. He saw his old grandmother passing through the streets in a great hurry, with an expression of heart-rending anguish on her face. From low-hanging clouds the rain drizzled on her ominously; she was going to Paimpol, having been sent for by the naval Bureau to be informed of his death.

He was struggling now, the death-rattle in his throat. With a sponge they wiped from the corners of his mouth the water and the blood, which had come out from his lungs by the convulsions of agony. Still the magnificent sun was lighting up everything, and setting, presented the picture of a world on fire, with clouds dipped in blood. Through the port-hole crept a wide streak of reddish light, flooding Sylvestre's death-bed and forming a halo around his head.

. . . At this moment, this same sun was seen yonder, in Brittany, where the clocks struck the noon hour. It was the very same sun and exactly at the same moment in its continuous duration; there, however, it had a very different color, describing a wider circle in the bluish sky. With a white mellow light it shone on Grandma Yvonne, who seated in front of the door was busy sewing.

In Iceland, where it was now morning, it shone also at this same hour of death, very pale, so that it would have been impossible to be seen but for its extreme obliquity. It shed melancholy rays over the fiord where the *Marie* was drifting; and at this moment the sky was of such a hyperborean purity that it gave the idea of frozen planets without atmosphere; with a crystal-like transparency it brought into relief the details of this chaos of rocks called Iceland,—all the view to be had from the *Marie* was placed on the same background standing on end. Yann also had a strange appearance in this wan light, mechanically fishing.

. . . At the moment when the streak of light

coming in through the port-hole was extinguished and the equatorial sun disappeared completely in the gilded waves, the eyes of the dying grandson rolled inwards towards his brow as if to vanish in his head. Then they closed his lids with their own long lashes, and Sylvestre became very beautiful and calm again, like a reclining marble statue sunk in slumber. . . .

CHAPTER II.

. . . I cannot refrain from describing the burial of Sylvestre, which was conducted under my supervision in the island of Singapore. During the first days of our voyage we had thrown into the Chinese sea enough other dead; as this Malay coast was very near, we decided to keep the body a few hours longer.

It was early in the morning, on account of the terrible sun, when a boat took it to the shore all covered with the French flag. The strange city was still deep in sleep when we landed. A little cart sent by the consul was waiting at the landing-place; we placed there Sylvestre and the wooden cross, made for him on board. As it was done in haste the paint was not dry yet and the white letters of his name ran into the black background.

We crossed this Babel just when the sun was rising. We were very much affected, finding

there, close to the dirty Chinese rabble, the quiet of a French church. Under this lofty white nave I stood alone with my sailors, a missionary priest was chanting the *Dies Iræ*, which sounded like a sweet magical incantation. Through the open door enchanted gardens were to be seen,—wonderful verdure and giant palms; a gentle breeze undulated the flowery shrubs and a shower of carmine-colored petals almost fell in the church.

Afterward we went to a distant cemetery. Our little procession of sailors was very modest and the bier was still covered with the French colors. We were obliged to cross the Chinese quarter, swarming with yellow humanity. Then we passed through the suburbs of Malays and Indians where every sort of Asiatic faces stared at us with astonished eyes.

Then we came to the open country, already very hot. Over the shaded roads wonderful butterflies with velvety blue wings fluttered about. A grand display of flowers and palm-trees everywhere and all the splendors of the luxuriant tropics!

At last we reach the cemetery,—the tombs

of mandarins with multi-colored inscriptions, dragons, and monsters, a wonderful foliage and exotic plants! The place where we put him looked like a nook in the gardens of Indra.

We planted in the earth this little wooden crucifix, made hastily the night before: —

SYLVESTRE MOAN.

Nineteen years.

And we left him there, in haste to return on account of the sun, which was climbing the heavens higher and higher, often turning back to have a look at him in the shade of marvelous trees, under the beautiful flowers.

CHAPTER III.

Our transport continued her way across the Indian Ocean. The suffering sick were still kept close below. On deck nothing was seen but heedlessness, health, and youth, all around it was a veritable festival of pure air and sunshine over the wide sea.

During the fine trade-wind weather the sailors, stretched in the shades of the sails, were amusing themselves with their parrots, making them race with each other. (In Singapore, which they had just left, the sailors can buy every kind of tamed animals.) They all had chosen baby-parrots with childish looks on their faces, tailless but already green,—and such an admirable green! Their papas and mammas had been green, so they, very young, had inherited the same color. Standing on the clean deck of the vessel they resembled very much the fresh leaves just blown from some tropical tree.

Sometimes they brought them together, when these birds would comically watch each other and turn their necks in every direction as if to examine each other from different points. They would walk about, limping, with a flutter of the wing, and then quickly try to fly to no one knew where, and some of them would fall down.

The monkeys were taught to make tricks, which was another source of amusement. Some were caressed fondly and even kissed lavishly, as they nestled close to the breasts of their masters, looking at them with eyes like a woman's, half grotesque, and half touching.

As three o'clock struck the quartermaster brought on deck two linen bags, sealed with large seals of red wax and marked with Sylvestre's name.

In accordance with the regulations for the diseased these were to be sold at auction, all these clothings, all that belonged to him on earth. And the sailors in high spirits collected around them. On board a hospital-ship they see it very often, this sale of the bags, so they are used to

it. Moreover, very few knew Sylvestre on board this vessel. His jackets, his shirts, and his blue-striped jerseys were handled, turned over, and then bought at any price, the purchasers bidding for their own amusement.

Then the turn came to the little box which was sold for fifty *sous*. They had put aside the letters and the military medal to send them to his family. There still remained the book of songs, the book of Confucius, buttons, needles, and other small things which the foresight of Yvonne had placed in the box for mending and darning.

Then the quartermaster, who was exhibiting the objects for sale, brought out two small Buddhas taken from a pagoda to be given to Gaud. A shout of laughter burst when they were offered as the last lot,—so grotesque was their appearance. If these sailors were laughing it was not for lack of feeling, but merely through thoughtlessness.

Finally they sold the bags and the purchaser began to erase the name inscribed on them, writing his own instead.

Then they gave a careful sweep of the broom over the clean deck, removing all dust and trash which had dropped from the unpacking, and the sailors returned gaily to play with their parrots and monkeys.

CHAPTER IV.

. . . . . .

One day in the first part of June, as Grandma Yvonne was returning home, some neighbors informed her that she had been sent for by the commissioner from the Registry Office of the Navy. Surely it was something regarding her grandson; but this did not give her any cause of fear. In families of seamen they frequently have business with the Registry Office; so she, daughter, wife, mother, and grandmother of sailors, knew this Bureau for the last sixty years. Undoubtedly it was something to do with his "delegation," or perhaps it was on account of some money from the *Circé* they would give her as proxy for Sylvestre. Knowing well what was due *Monsieur le Commissaire,* she made her toilet, putting on her best gown and a white cap and set out about two o'clock. Trotting along swiftly, with quick and short steps, over the footpath on the cliff, she advanced towards Paimpol, all the same a little

anxious, because she had received no letters during the last two months.

On the way she met her old sweetheart seated in front of the door, looking very old since the frosts of the winter.

"Well, whenever you are ready, you know, don't trouble yourself, my beauty! . . . (Alluding again to the costume of boards.)

The gay June weather smiled about her everywhere. On the rocky heights there was nothing but bare thorn-brooms, with golden yellow flowers. But passing towards the lowlands, sheltered from the sea-breezes, immediately one met with a charming fresh verdure,—hedgerows of hawthorns in blossom and tall fragrant grass. She hardly took notice of all these; she who had the experience of so many fleeting seasons, now seeming to her short as days.

Around crumbling huts, with blackened walls, there grew roses, pinks, and gillyflowers, and even on the high roofs of thatch and moss there were many obscure flowers that attracted the first white butterflies. In this home of the Icelanders the spring had been almost without love, and the

beautiful daughters of this proud race, who were seen sitting dreamily on the doorsteps, seemed to shoot forth their glances far beyond the objects visible to their blue and brown eyes. The young men, the center of their musings and desires, were yonder, on their great fishing expedition over the hyperborean seas.

But this was spring, all the same, warm and pleasant, with the gentle buzzing of flies, and the perfume of sapplings. All these soulless objects continued smiling at this old grandmother, who was walking as fast as she could to learn of the death of her last grandson. The terrible moment approached when she was to be informed of the thing happened so far away on the Chinese sea. She was taking that fatal trip which Sylvestre had foreseen at the moment of his death, and which had wrung from him his last tears of agony, —his good old grandmother sent for by the Registry Office to be apprised of his death! Very distinctly he had seen her pass along that pathway, walking fast, erect, with her small brown shawl, her umbrella, and big head-dress. And that last apparition had made him toss about in his

bed and writhe with a frightful shaking, while the enormous red tropical sun, setting in all its splendor, sent its rays through the port-hole of the hospital-ship to see him die.

He, in this his last hallucination had pictured this walk of the poor old woman as taking place under a rainy sky, but which, on the contrary, was made on a gay, mocking day of spring. . . .

Nearing Paimpol, she began to feel uneasy and to walk still faster.

Now she is in the gray town, in the narrow paved streets flooded in sunshine. She greeted a few old women of her age who sat at their windows. Puzzled seeing her, they were saying:

"Where can she be going like this, in such a hurry, on this week day, dressed in her Sunday clothes?"

Monsieur le Commissaire of the Registry Office happened to be out. His clerk, a young, ugly, fifteen-year-old chap, was seated at the desk; being too puny to ever make a good fisherman he had received some education, and passed his time in this same chair, with black sleeves on, scribbling on a piece of paper.

On hearing her give the name, he rose, with an air of importance, to take some stamped packages from one of the pigeon-holes. He had quite a number of them. . . . What was he going to tell her? Certificates, papers bearing seals, a sailors' record book grown yellow by the sea-air,—upon all these there was the breath of death. . . .

He spread them all before the poor old woman, who began to tremble in dread of bad news; for she recognized two letters which were written by Gaud for her and which she saw now unopened. . . .

This same thing had happened before, twenty years ago, at the time of her son Pierre's death. Letters were received from China by *Monsieur le Commissaire*, who had delivered them to her.

Now he began to read in a doctoral voice.

"Moan, Jean—Marie—Sylvestre, registered in Paimpol, folio 213, matriculation number 2091, deceased on board the *Bien-Hoa*, on the fourteenth. . . ."

"What? . . . what has happened him, my good sir?"

"Deceased! . . . He is deceased," was his answer.

This clerk undoubtedly was not wicked; if he broke to her the news in such a brutal manner, it was only for want of judgment and lack of intelligence. Seeing she did not understand that high-sounding word he explained it in the Breton dialect:

"Marw éo! . . ."

"Marw éo! . . . (He is dead. . .)."

She repeated with the tremulous voice of old age like a poor, cracked echo, resounding an indifferent phrase.

Though this was what she had already half guessed, it merely made her tremble. It was quite certain that it did not affect her at this moment. In the first place her susceptibility to suffer was blunted on account of old age, especially, since last winter. Grief did not come at once. Then something jarred in her head, confusing this death with others,—she had lost so many of them, all sons! . . . It took her a moment to fully realize that this one was her last, so well beloved, the object of all her prayers, all

her life, all her thoughts and attentions, which were already darkened by the melancholy approach of second childhood.

She also felt ashamed to give full vent to her despair in the presence of this little fellow, who horrified her. Was this the way to break the news of the death of a grandson to his grandmother? . . . She stood erect before the desk, her limbs growing stiff, twisting the fringes of her brown shawl with her old bony fingers, chapped from washing.

How distant her home seemed to her now! How long she had to walk before she could reach her thatched hut, where she hastened to shut herself up like a wounded animal retreating to his hole to die. It was for this same purpose that she forced herself not to think too much, not to fully comprehend it yet, being specially frightened by such a long journey.

They gave her an order to receive as heir the thirty francs realized from the sale of Sylvestre's bags. Then they delivered his letters, certificates, and the box containing his military medal. She took them awkwardly with her fingers, which

remained open, passing from one hand to the other, unable to find her pocket to put them in.

She passed through Paimpol, walking straight ahead, paying no attention to any one, her figure a little bent, as if about to fall, a buzzing sound in her ears,—and she hurried faster than her limbs could bear, like a poor antiquated machine, set on a rapid motion, for the last time, heedless of breaking the springs.

At the third kilometer she walked all bent and exhausted. From time to time she hit her heavy wooden shoes against stones, receiving a painful shock in the head. She hastened to bury herself in a corner of her house for fear of falling and of having to be carried home.

CHAPTER V.

"Old Yvonne is tipsy!"

She had fallen, and the street urchins ran after her. It was just as she entered Ploubazlanec, where are many houses along the road. But she found strength enough to rise and hobble along on her stick.

"Old Yvonne is tipsy!"

And these little impudent children came to look at her laughing. Her head-dress was all awry. There were a few among the boys who were not so bad at heart. When looking at her closely they saw the grimace of despair on her face. They turned back with a regret and did not dare to laugh again.

Arriving at her home she closed the door and, uttering a cry of distress, threw herself in a corner, turning her face towards the wall. Her cap had fallen over her eyes; she flung it down on the floor,—her poor best cap, so well taken care of till

now! Her fine Sunday garment was all soiled. A little curl of yellowish-white hair had escaped from under the head-band, thus completing this poor woman's disorderly appearance.

CHAPTER VI.

Gaud, who had come to inquire about her, found her dishevelled, her arms hanging down, her head against the stone wall, her face disfigured, and sobbing plaintively like a child. She was scarcely able to cry ; the exhausted eyes of grandmothers cannot shed tears.

"My grandson ! he is dead !"

And she threw into her lap the letters, the papers, and the medal.

Gaud saw at a glance that this was true, and falling on her knees she began to pray.

They remained there almost dumb, so long as the June twilight lasted, which in this time of the year is very long in Brittany ; and which in far-away Iceland does not die at all. The cricket that always brings good luck was chirping in the fireplace all the same ; and the yellow light of the evening came in from the dormer-window in this hut of the Moans, who had all been swal-

lowed by the sea and who were now an extinct family. . . .

At last Gaud spoke :

" I will come and live with you, dear grandmother, I will bring my bed which they have left me ; I will take care of you and look after you ; you shall not be all alone. . . .

She mourned for her little friend, Sylvestre ; but she was distracted also with grief by thinking about somebody else,—he who had departed for the great fishing expedition.

They were going to let Yann know about the death of Sylvestre. The *chasseurs* were on the point of departing. Would he too weep for him ? Very likely, for he loved him so much. . . . And in the midst of her tears she thought a good deal about this. She was sometimes indignant with this hard-hearted fellow, sometimes filled with tenderness for him ; for he also was going to feel this grief, and which was a tie between the two ; anyway, her heart was full of him.

CHAPTER VII.

. . . One pale-evening in August the letter announcing to Yann the death of his brother reached him on board the *Marie* on the sea of Iceland. It was in the evening, after a day of hard work and excessive fatigue, when they had gone below-stairs to supper and to sleep. His eyes heavy with sleep, he read it in a dark corner, by the yellow gleam of a small lamp. At first, he also remained insensible, bewildered ; like one who does not fully realize the thing. Being reserved and proud about everything concerning his innermost feelings he hid the letter in his blue jacket next to his breast, as sailors do, saying nothing about it.

But he had not the heart to sit down to supper with the rest ; so, disdaining even to give any explanation for his conduct, he threw himself into his bunk and fell asleep.

Soon he was dreaming of Sylvestre's death and burial. . . .

Towards midnight, being in a state of mind peculiar to seamen, who are conscious of the time while asleep, and who feel the approaching moment when they will be awakened to take their turn of watching. He still saw in his dreams this burial. He was telling to himself :

" I only dream ; fortunately, they will come to wake me up and this will vanish."

But when a rough hand shook him, and a voice began to say : " Gaos, get up, it's your turn of watch now." He heard the slight rustle of a paper against his breast,—sinister music, bringing home to him the reality of that death ! " Oh, yes, the letter. . . . Then it was all true !" and the impression was becoming more poignant, more cruel ; and getting up quickly, after this rough awakening, he struck his head against the beams.

Then he dressed and opened the hatchway to take his post at the fishing. . . .

CHAPTER VIII.

When Yann was on deck he looked around him, with heavy, sleepy eyes, over the large familiar circle of the sea.

That night immensity made itself felt through most astonishingly simple aspects, in neutral colors, giving only impressions of profundity.

The horizon, which did not indicate any particular region of the earth, nor even any geological age, many times must have presented that same appearance since the run of centuries; and looking at it you fancy that you do not see anything, nothing but the eternity of things which *are* and which can not help *being*.

It was not absolutely dark. The gloom was not very deep on account of a faint light, the remnant of the sun's rays, that came from nowhere. It roared as usual, making an aimless complaint. It was gray, of a dim elusive gray.

The sea during its repose and slumber is deceptive with its nameless tints.

Clouds were scattered about the sky. They were of all kinds of shapes, for all material things must have some kind of form and shape. In the darkness they mingled together, forming a vast veil.

But at a certain point in the sky, very low, near the horizon, almost touching the waters, they were formed like the veins of marble, although at a great distance,—an indistinct design, as if traced by some careless hand, a chance combination, not destined to be seen, fugitive, ready to be dispersed away. And only this, in all these surroundings, had a particular significance ; one might have imagined that the melancholy, imperceptible thought of nothingness had been inscribed there. And the eyes would at last involuntarily remain fascinated by it.

As Yann's wandering eyes became gradually accustomed to the outside darkness, he looked again and again to this unique appearance of the sky ; it had assumed the form of a person sinking down, with outstretched arms. Now that he had

begun to see this appearance, it seemed to him a real human shadow, rendered gigantic by the distance.

Then in his imagination, where unspeakable dreams and primitive beliefs floated together, this ominous shadow, plunging in at the end of this gloomy sky, little by little mingled with the memory of his dead brother, a last manifestation of him.

He was used to such strange associations of imagination that are formed, in early life, in the minds of children. But words, vague as they are, remain still too precise to express these things ; one would need the uncertain language spoken sometimes in dreams, of which, at waking, we retain enigmatical and senseless fragments.

While contemplating these clouds he felt penetrate his heart an agonizing and profound sadness, full of the unknown, and the mysterious that congealed the blood. He realized now more fully than ever that he was no more to see his poor little brother, never! The grief that had been so long in piercing his rigid and robust heart, now gushed in filling it full to the brim. He once

more saw the youthful figure of Sylvestre, his gentle eyes of a child. At the thought of embracing him, in spite of himself, something like a veil fell suddenly between his eyelids. At first, he failed to understand what it was ; never before, since a man, having wept. But big drops of tears began to roll down on his cheeks rapidly, and violent sobs swelled in his heart.

He went on fishing very fast, without losing time or saying a word ; and the other two who were listening to him in the silence, pretended not to do so, for fear of irritating him, knowing very well how haughty and reserved he was.

According to him death was the end of everything. Out of reverence, he was in the habit of joining in the prayers for the souls of the dead ; but he did not believe in a hereafter.

The sailors, in their conversation with each other, were telling all this in a decided manner, as something well known to them. This, however, did not prevent them having a vague apprehension of ghosts, an indefinite fear of cemeteries, an utmost confidence in the holy images and

patron saints, nor, specially, an innate veneration for the consecrated grounds of churches.

So Yann feared of being lost at sea, as if that could have been more annihilating ; and the thought that Sylvestre was left behind, on the other side of the earth, made his grief more intense, more despairing.

Full of scorn for the others he felt no shame or constraint in weeping, as if he was alone.

Outside the dark expanse was slowly whitening, although it was hardly two o'clock ; in the meantime it stretched farther and farther away, growing boundless, and frightfully hollow. With this kind of breaking dawn, the eyes opened wider and the wide-awake mind could grasp better the immensity of remoteness ; the limits of the visible expanse always receded and fleeted away.

This was a very pale light, but it increased gradually ; it seemed as if it came in small currents and light jerks ; the infinite objects seemed to be illumined by transparency, as if white-flamed lamps were one by one put behind the shapeless gray clouds, rising discreetly, with a mysterious

precaution, as if afraid to disturb the morning repose of the sea.

Below the horizon that big white lamp was the sun, which dragged on feebly, before starting on its cold and slow tour over the waters, begun so early in the morning.

That day the rosy tints of the dawn were not to be seen ; it remained pale and mournful. And on board the *Marie*, a man was weeping, the big Yann. . . .

These tears of his wild brother, and this profound melancholy of the outside world, were the signs of mourning shown for the little, obscure hero, on these Icelandic waters, where he had passed half his life.

When it was broad daylight Yann abruptly wiped his eyes with the sleeve of his woolen jacket and stopped crying. All this was ended. He seemed completely occupied now with the fishing, with the bustle of real things of the present, apparently having no thought for anything else. Besides, the lines kept him busy ; he hardly could manage them with his strong arms.

Around the fishermen, in the immense depths,

new changes came into view. The magnificent display of the infinite, the grand spectacle of the morning, had come to an end, and now the far distance seemed to close in, to shut in over the waters. How could anybody believe to have seen, a moment before, the sea so limitless? The horizon was very near now, hardly covering much space.

The expanse was filled in with floating veils, some indistinct like mist, others with visible outlines, as if fringed. They fell softly, in great silence, like white gauze, having no weight; but fell on all sides at the same time, quickly covering, enveloping them. It was so hard to breathe, the air being so oppressive and encumbered!

It was the first fogs of autumn which were rising. In a few minutes this shroud became dense and impenetrable; around the *Marie* nothing was to be seen but a pale dampness, diffused with light, in which even the masts of the vessels had disappeared.

"There is the fog again!" were telling the old men. Since a long time they were acquainted with this inevitable companion of the second

period of their fishing ; but it also announced the end of the season in Iceland and the start back on their voyage home to Brittany.

It settled in fine sparkling drops on their beards : and it made their bronzed faces glisten with moisture. Looking at one another from opposite ends of the vessel, they took each other for ghosts ; and as a set-off, nearer objects were seen very crudely under the whitish, colorless light. One took care not to breathe through the mouth ; the fog and the chill penetrated to the lungs.

In the meantime the fishing was going on briskly and nobody talked, all their attention given to the lines. Every now and then large fishes were heard dropping on deck with a sound like that of a cracking whip. There they wriggled madly, flapping their tails on the deck ; everything was bespattered by sea-water and silvery scales in the course of their struggles. The sailor who was cutting open their bellies with his big knife, in his haste sometimes cut his fingers, and the red blood mingled with the brine.

CHAPTER IX.

They remained this time ten successive days in the thick fog, without seeing anything. The fishing went on very successfully; and with so much activity they did not find it tedious. One of them, from time to time, at regular intervals, blew a horn, which gave out a sound like the bellowing of a wild beast. And sometimes, outside, from the depths of the white fog, another distant bellowing was heard, answering their call. Then they would watch more carefully. If that cry was getting nearer they would all bend their ears towards this unknown neighbor, which doubtless they would never see and whose presence was nevertheless a menace to them.

They made all sorts of conjectures about it, which became a sort of occupation to them and company to their minds. Through their desire of seeing it, their eyes tried to pierce the impalpable white curtain hanging in the air.

As it was gliding away, the bellowing of the horn would die away in the hollow distance. Then they would remain alone in the silence, amid this infinity of motionless vapors. Everything was drenched with water; everything was impregnated with salt and brine. The cold was chilling to the marrow.

The sun remained longer below the horizon. Already they had real nights lasting only one or two hours; and the gray twilight was gloomy and frigid.

Every morning they sounded the waters to find out whether the *Marie* had ventured too near to the coast of Iceland. But all the lines aboard tied together were not long enough to touch the bed of the sea; so they were in deep waters, in the open sea.

Life on board was rough and healthful. The freezing cold added to their comfort in the evening,—the impression of a snug and warm home that they experienced in this cabin of massive oak when they went below for their supper or for sleep.

During the day they spoke little with each other,

these men of monastic habits. Each one holding his line, remained for hours and hours at the same unchanging posture, only his arms were occupied with the continuous work of fishing. They were scarcely two or three meters apart, but it ended in not even seeing one another.

The tranquillity of the fog and the white obscurity lulled their minds to sleep. As they fished, they would sometimes hum a national air, in a low voice for fear of scaring the fishes away. Ideas came more slowly and more seldom. They seemed to be expanded and to spread out in order to fill the space of time, leaving no gaps, nor intervals of nonentity. They did not think of women because it was still cold ; but they would dream of incoherent and amazing things, and the woof of these fancies was as ethereal as the fog. . . .

This foggy month of August usually closed each year the fishing season in Iceland, in a quiet cheerless manner. Otherwise, there was always the same plenitude of physical life inflating the sailors' lungs and hardening their muscles.

Yann had at once fully recovered his ordinary

way, as if his great sorrow had entirely disappeared. Vigilant and alert, he was always ready to steer the boat or to fish, with the easy gait of one who was free of care; moreover, communicative when he chose to be, which was very seldom, carrying his head high, with an air indifferent, yet domineering.

That evening when they sat at table in their wretched cabin, protected by the Virgin in faïence, Yann, a big knife in his hand and an appetizing dish before him, once more began to laugh as of old, at the jokes the others made.

Perhaps he thought a little of Gaud, whom Sylvestre in his last moments, on his dying bed, had probably desired to see married to him, and who had now become a poor girl, without a friend, alone in the world.

Perhaps, above all, grief for the departed brother still remained in the depths of his heart.

But this heart of Yann's was like a virgin forest, difficult to manage, little understood, where many things took place hidden from curious eyes.

CHAPTER X.

One morning, towards three o'clock, when they were quietly dreaming under their shroud of fog, they heard some voices which sounded strange and unfamiliar. Those who were on deck looked about questioning one another with their glances.

"Who's that speaking?"

No one, nobody; nobody had said anything. And, in fact, the sound had seemed to come from the outer space.

Then the man who had the charge of the fog-horn, and who had neglected to use it since the night before, now rushed for it and began to blow with all his might.

This was enough to give them the shiver in the silence, and then, as if an apparition had been evoked by this vibrating sound of the horn, a huge and unexpected gray form was outlined which towered menacingly very close to them,—masts, yards, rigging, the likeness of a ship

sprung suddenly in the air just like the magic pictures thrown on a canvas screen by a jet of light. And other men appeared very near them, almost within their reach, bending over the railings, looking at them with open eyes, amazed and frightened. . . .

The crew of the *Marie* now rushed for oars, beams and hooks, and whatever long and stout thing they could lay their hands on in the vessel, and they pushed them against this strange craft. And now the others, also bewildered, began to stretch out long poles to keep their vessel at a distance from the *Marie*.

But there was only a slight creaking in the rigging above their heads, and the sails having been entangled for a moment, were again put to rights without any damage. The shock, very gentle on account of the calm waters, was almost wholly deadened ; it had been so slight that it seemed the other ship had no substance, as if it was something very soft, almost without weight.

But after this sudden shock, the men began tc laugh. They had recognized each other :

"Ahoy, the *Marie !*"

"Hallo! Gaos, Laumec, Guermeur!"

That apparition was the *Reine-Bertha*, Captain Larvoër, also from Paimpol; the sailors were from the neighboring villages. That tall man, with the black beard, showing his teeth when laughing, was Kerjégon, from Ploudaniel; the others came from Plounés or Pleunérin.

"Why didn't you blow your horn, you band of savages?" asked Larvoër of the *Reine-Bertha*.

"And why didn't you, you band of pirates and corsairs, *bad poison* of the sea?"

"Oh, with us, you see, it's different; *we are forbidden to make any noise.*" (He gave this explanation with the air of a mysterious hint; with a ghastly smile which afterwards was often recalled by the crew of the *Marie*, and gave them much to think about.)

And then, as he had said a little too much, he concluded with this joke:

"Our horn bursted, that fellow there blowing into it too hard."

And he pointed to a sailor with the features of a Triton, whose body was mostly made up of neck and chest, very massive, the legs too short,

and who had such a grotesque appearance that his strength of a deformed man was very repulsive. While they were looking at each other, waiting for a breeze or undercurrent to move one faster than the other and to separate them, they began to chat. Leaning over the sides of the boats, but keeping themselves apart with their long poles, they talked about home, the last letters brought by the *chasseurs*, their old parents, and their wives.

"My wife," said Kerjégon, "tells me that she has just had the little one we were expecting; that brings the number to a dozen now."

Another had had a twin, and a third announced the marriage of pretty Jeannie Caroff—a girl well known to all Icelanders—with an old sickly rich man in Plourivo.

They saw each other as through a white gauze; their voices also seemed to have changed, sounding as if muffled and coming from afar.

In the meanwhile Yann could not detach his eyes off one of these fishermen, an elderly little fellow, whom, he was sure, he had never seen before, but who suddenly spoke to him:

"Hallo there, Yann!" with an air of great intimacy. He had the irritating ugly face of a monkey, with a wink of malice in his piercing eyes.

"I have been informed," said Larvoër, of the *Reine-Berthe*, "of the death of old Yvonne Moan's grandson, who, as you know, was serving in the Navy, in the Chinese squadron. It's a great pity!"

Hearing this, all the men of the *Marie* turned toward Yann, to see if he knew anything about this misfortune.

"Yes," he said in an undertone, but in a proud and indifferent manner; "my father wrote to me about it in his last letter."

They all looked at him, with a curiosity for his grief, and this annoyed him.

These communications were made hastily through the pallid mist, while the moments of this strange interview were flying swiftly by.

"My wife wrote to me in the same letter," continued Larvoër, "that Monsieur Mével's daughter has left the town to live in Ploubazlanec and take care of old Moan, her great-aunt; she is

now obliged to work for a living. I had always thought that she was a brave and courageous girl, in spite of the airs of a lady she was putting on."

Then once more all looked at Yann, which annoyed him still more ; and the color rose to his sunburnt cheeks.

With these appreciations of Gaud, their conversation came to an end with these men on the *Reine-Berthe*, whom no living person was ever to see again. In a moment their figures almost disappeared, for their vessel had drifted away, and all at once the crew of the *Marie* had nothing to push back with their wooden sticks ; all their spars, oars, masts, or yards moved away, groping in the surrounding emptiness ; and, one by one, they fell over heavily in the sea, like big lifeless limbs. They drew on board the now useless defenses ; the *Reine-Berthe*, plunged again in the thick fog, suddenly vanished from view like the effaced image seen through a transparency, when the lamp shining behind is put out.

They tried to hail her, but no answer came back to them, only a sort of mocking clamor of many

voices, ending in sobs, at which they looked at one another in surprise.

The *Reine-Berthe* did not return with the other Icelanders ; and as the *Samuel-Azénide* had come across in a fiord, to a dubious wreck (her taffrail with a part of her keel), nobody expected her back ; in the month of October the names of all her crew were inscribed upon black slabs in the church.

Since this last apparition, whose date is very well remembered by the crew of the *Marie*, up to the time of their return home, they did not have any stormy and bad weather on the Icelandic seas, while, on the contrary, three weeks before, a westerly gale had swept away several sailors and swallowed up two vessels. Now they recalled the smile of Larvoër, and bringing all these facts together, they made many conjectures.

At night, Yann saw more than once the sailor with the malicious wink of a monkey, and some on board the *Marie* asked themselves timorously, whether on that morning they had not been talking with the dead.

CHAPTER XI.

Summer was advancing, and at the end of August the Icelanders were seen coming back with the first fogs in the mornings.

The two forsaken women had been living, for three months, together in Ploubazlanec, in the Moans' cottage. Gaud had taken the place of a daughter in this poor rest of dead sailors. She had taken there all that was left after the sale of her father's house,—her elegant bed in city style, and her gowns of different colors. She had made herself her new black gown in a plainer fashion, and like old Yvonne, wore a mourning head-dress of thick muslin trimmed only with folds.

Every day she went out sewing for the rich of the town, and returned in the evening, without being troubled on her way by any bold glances, for she was still a little haughty, and was regarded with the respect due a young lady. Every

time they saw her they touched their caps as they had done formerly.

In the lovely summer twilight she returned from Paimpol, all along this rocky road, breathing the pure air of the reposing sea. She had not used the needle long enough to have been disfigured like so many others, who pass their lives bending over their work. And she straightened up her slender form, as she looked at the sea, as she gazed over the wide expanse, where Yann was sailing now.

This same road led to his house. If she had walked over a more rocky region swept clear by the winds, she would reach the hamlet of Pors-Even, where the trees, covered with gray moss, never grow big, and bend in the direction of the squalls from the west. She would undoubtedly never go again to Pors-Even, although the distance was less than a league. Only once in her life she had been there, and that had been sufficient to impart a charm to this road. Moreover, Yann would often take that same road, and from her door she could follow his goings and comings along the short thorn-broom over that flat land.

That's why she loved so much this Ploubazlanec region. She felt almost happy that fortune had cast her there ; in any other part of the world she would not have the courage to live.

At this season, the last of August, there is a sort of languor in the air, peculiar to warm countries ; it comes from the south toward the north. There are luminous evenings, and also the reflection of that huge sun, which comes as far as the Breton shores. Very often the sky is clear and calm, without a cloud anywhere.

At the hour of Gaud's return home, every object was dissolving into the night, the shadows commencing to mingle together, standing boldly against the sky. Here and there a tuft of thorn-broom stood erect on a high ground, between two rocks, like a disordered plume of feathers ; a group of twisted trees formed a dark mass in some hollow ; or some straw-thatched hamlet would make a hump-backed silhouette above the moor. At the crossroads, weather-beaten images of Christ, guarding the country, stretched their black arms, leaning on the crucifixes like veritable executed criminals ; and in the distance

the manche was clearly outlined like a great mirror reflecting the vast obscurity of the sky above, already darkened towards the horizon. In this country even the calm and beautiful weather was tinged with melancholy ; in spite of all, there hovered a sort of restlessness over every object ; an anxiety emanating from the sea, to which so many lives had been confided and whose eternal menace is but in a slumber.

Gaud, plunged in deep thought on this fine evening, did not find her way back long enough. The salt smell of the beaches filled the air, mingled with the fragrance from the little flowers growing among the thorny bushes. But for Grandma Yvonne, now waiting for her at home, she would have willingly lingered in these paths among the broom, like young ladies fond of dreaming on a summer evening in the parks.

Sweet memories of her childhood came back to her, as she walked through these parts, but how dim, distant and petty they seemed by the side of her love ! For all that, she loved to think of Yann as her lover,—a heartless, disdainful and cold lover, who would never consent to be hers ;

but to whom she remained ever faithful, without trusting this secret of hers to any one. At present she was happy with the thought that he was in Iceland ; and there he lived as in a cloister, and he could not give away his love to any one else.

It is true, he would return one of these days ; but she looked upon that return more calmly than before. She naturally understood that he would not scorn her more now on account of her poverty, for he was different from the other fellows. And the death of little Sylvestre would surely bring them nearer to each other. On his return he could not fail to come to see the grandmother of his friend : and she had decided to be at home when he made his visit ; she thought that this would not be undignified. Appearing to remember nothing she would talk to him as to a long-known friend ; she would speak even with affection, as if he were Sylvestre's brother, and try to seem quite natural. And who knows ; Perhaps now, when she was so alone in the world, she might be like a sister to him ; she might rely on his friendship, even to ask it for a support, of course explaining beforehand that she had no

afterthought of marriage. She judged him to be of a wild nature, full of independent ideas, but tender-hearted, frank, and capable of understanding the goodness which comes out of the heart.

What would be his feelings when he saw her there so poor, living in this hut almost in ruins? Ah! yes, very poor! for Grandma Moan was too feeble to go out washing now; she had only her pension of a widow. It is true she did not eat much now, and the two could manage to support themselves without having to ask for help from outside.

Night was always fallen when she returned home every day; before she could get there, she had to descend over worn rocks, their hut being a little below the level of the Ploubazlanec road, built on a ground sloping down toward the beach. It was almost hidden beneath its thick straw thatch all bent over, looking like the back of a huge dead beast, wounded under its bristling hair. Its walls had the dark color and roughness of the rocks, covered here and there with little tufts of moss and cochlearia. Three uneven steps led to the threshold, and the door was opened by

pulling a cord attached, through a hole, to the inside latch.

On entering, the first thing that met the eye was a window dug out in the thickness of the wall, overlooking the sea, from which came the pale gleam of the twilight. In the big stove burned the sweet-smelling twigs of pine and beechwood, which Grandmother Yvonne had gathered in her walks along the roads. She herself was seated looking after their bit of supper. When at home she tied only a band around her head, to save her new caps. Her profile, still lovely, was outlined against the red flame. She looked up at Gaud. Her brown eyes, now taken a faded color, appearing almost blue, had the troubled, uncertain stare of old age. Every day she addressed Gaud with the same words:

"Oh! how late you are to-night, my dear!"

"No, Grandma!" answered sweetly Gaud, who was used to this. "No, this is the same time as other days."

"Ah! . . . it seemed to me much later than usual."

They supped at a table, now almost out of

shape through constant use, but still very stout, like the trunk of an oak. And the cricket never failed to give them a silvery music.

One side of the room was covered with roughly carved wainscoting now almost worm-eaten. When opened they gave access to a row of bunks, where generations of fishermen were born, had slept, and where also their old mothers had breathed their last.

Very ancient-looking kitchen utensils were hung from the rafters, as well as packets of herbs, wooden spoons, and smoked bacon; also, old fishing-nets which had been left there since the shipwreck of the last Moans, and whose meshes were gnawed by rats at night.

Gaud's bed, covered with white muslin curtains, was placed in a corner, and had an elegant appearance in this Celtic hut.

A framed photograph of Sylvestre in sailor clothes hung on the granite wall. His grandmother had fixed his military medal to it, as well as a pair of anchors made of red cloth, which the sailors wear on their right sleeve. Gaud also had purchased in Paimpol one of

those mourning wreaths of black and white beads which, in Brittany, they place round the portraits of the dead. This was his little mausoleum, all that he had to keep consecrated his memory in his Breton home.

In summer evenings they did not sit up late, to economize the light; when the weather was pleasant, they sat a little while on the doorsteps, and watched the people passing along the road, a little above their heads.

Then old Yvonne retired to her bunk and Gaud to her fine bed, where she would soon fall asleep, being very tired and having walked a long way, and dream of the return of the Icelanders, not feeling troubled at all, like a wise and resolute girl.

CHAPTER XII.

But one day, hearing in Paimpol that the *Marie* had arrived, she was seized with a kind of fever; all the calmness she had shown while waiting had disappeared. Quickly finishing her work, without exactly knowing why, she started on her way home much earlier than usual, and on the road, along which she was hastening, she recognized him in the distance coming towards her.

Her limbs trembled and she felt them bend under her weight. He was now very near to her, only twenty steps away, with his manly figure and curly hair, covered by his fisherman's cap. She was caught unawares by this meeting, and thought she would totter, and he would notice it —she felt she would die of shame. . . . And then, she had an old cap on, and a tired look on her face, having tried to finish her work quickly. She would give anything to hide herself among those clusters of thorn-broom, to disappear in

some marten's hole. Moreover, he, too, had made a movement of retreat, as if to turn in another direction; but it was too late—they met on a narrow path.

Not to touch her, he stepped one side on the bank with a swerve, like a shy horse, looking at her wildly and furtively.

She also lifted up her eyes for half a second, giving him, in spite of herself, an imploring look full of anguish, and at this involuntary meeting of their glances, swift as a flash of lightning, her gray pupils had seemed to grow big and brighten up with the gleam of a grand thought, flashing out a bluish flame; while her face had become crimson up to the temples, even under her blond tresses.

Touching his cap he simply said:

"Good evening, Mademoiselle Gaud."

"Good evening, Monsieur Yann," she answered. And this was all; he was gone. She continued her way, still trembling; but felt, as the distance increased between them, to breathe freely and regain her strength.

At home, she found old Moan still in a corner,

her head between her hands, crying and sobbing like a little child, her disheveled hair falling down from under her cap like skeins of gray hemp.

"Oh! my good Gaud, I met son Gaos near Plouherzel when I was coming back from gathering my wood; you can guess that we talked about my little one. They arrived this morning from Iceland, and in the afternoon he came to see me while I was out. Poor boy! his eyes were filled with tears. He even accompanied me to our door, my dear Gaud, carrying my little fagot for me."

She listened to this standing, and her heart grew sadder and sadder. So this visit of Yann's, on which she had counted so much to tell him so many things, was already made and doubtless would not be repeated; it was all over. . . .

Then the cottage looked to her more desolate, their poverty more unendurable, and the world more empty; and she bowed her head with a desire to die.

CHAPTER XIII.

GRADUALLY winter grew near, spreading out like a shroud very slowly drawn over. Gray days succeeded gray days, but Yann did not reappear,—and the two women lived alone and deserted.

With the cold, life became harder and more expensive, and then it was getting more difficult to take care of old Yvonne. Her poor head was affected. She got into fits of passion now, spoke bad words and used abusive language. She would have these fits once or twice a week for no reason at all.

Poor old woman! . . . She was still so sweet on her lucid and bright days, that Gaud did not cease to respect or to love her. To have always been good and to end by being so bad; to show towards the last hour such a depth of malice, that had lain dormant all her life; such a knowledge of coarse words, which she had hidden,—what derision of the soul! what a mocking mystery!

She began to sing also, and this was still worse to hear than her invectives. She sang haphazard whatever came to her,—an *oremus* from the mass, or vile couplets which she had heard years ago, from the sailors in the harbor. Sometimes she would take up the "Les Fillettes de Paimpol" or, swinging her head and beating time with her foot, she would hum :

"Mon Mari vient de partir ;
Pour la pêche d'Islande, mon mari vient de partir,
Il m'a laissé sans le sou,
Mais . . . trala, trala la lou . . .
J'en gagne !
J'en gagne ! . . ."

Each time she stopped short, her eyes would open very wide, gazing on the empty space with a lifeless expression,—like dying flames which suddenly blaze up, and then go out. Then she would bow her head and remain in a long trance, hanging her jaw down like a corpse.

She would not keep herself clean now, and this was a kind of trial which Gaud had not imagined.

One day she even came to forget her grandson.

"Sylvestre? Sylvestre?" . . . she said to Gaud as if asking to herself who could be this. "Well, my dear, you see, when I was young I had so many of them, boys and girls, that at this moment—dear me! . . ."

Saying which she threw up her poor wrinkled hands in a careless and almost scornful manner.

The next day she remembered him quite well, and wept all day long as she mentioned the thousand and one small things that he had said and done.

Oh, these vigils of the winter, when they did not have wood to make a fire! To work in the cold, to work for one's living; to finish before going to sleep the fine sewing brought home every evening from Paimpol!

Grandma Yvonne, sitting by the fireside, remained quiet, her feet against the dying embers, and her hands folded under her apron. But at the beginning of the evening Gaud always had to talk to her.

"You don't speak to me, why is it, my dear girl? In my time I have known girls of your age who knew how to talk. And it seems that

we wouldn't feel so sad and melancholy, if you would only talk a little."

Then Gaud would give her all the news she had heard in town, or tell her about the people she had come across on her way, talking of things which were quite indifferent to her ; then she would stop in the middle of her narrative when she saw the old woman had fallen asleep.

Nothing lively, nothing youthful around Gaud, whose youth called for youth. Her beauty was to be wasted in solitude.

The sea-breeze, coming from every direction, flickered the lamp, and the roar of the waves could be heard there as on board a vessel. Listening, she mingled with it the ever-present painful memory of Yann, whose domain were all these things. Through the long dreadful night, when all the furies were let loose and howling in the darkness outside, she was thinking of him with much misgiving and anxiety.

And then sitting alone, always alone, with her grandmother gone asleep, she would sometimes get frightened and look into the dark corners, thinking of her sailor ancestors who had slept in

these bunks, who had perished at sea, probably, on a stormy night like this, and whose souls might come back now. She did not feel herself protected against the visit of the dead by the presence of this old woman, who could be almost taken for one of them. . . .

All at once a shiver passed from her head to her feet, as she heard coming from the corner of the fireplace a small, gentle, cracked sound as if it were smothered underground. In a lively tone, which gave the chill to the soul, the voice would sing :

" Pour la pêche d'Islande, mon mari vient de partir ;
Il ma laissée sans le sou,
Mais . . . trala, trala, la lou. . . ."

And then she experienced that kind of fright which is caused by the company of madmen.

The rain was pouring down, with the small, unceasing noise of a fountain ; almost continuously she heard it trickle down the outside walls. From some leaks of the old mossy roof there was heard the untiring, monotonous dripping of water, always on the same spots, every time producing the same dull sound ; in some places it wet the floor

of the house, which was composed of stones, beaten earth, and shells.

You could feel the moisture everywhere envelope you with its cold and wide-spreading mass. Everywhere the water seething, lashing the house, crumbling into fog, deepening the darkness and still more isolating from each other the already scattered huts of the Ploubazlanec region.

Sunday evenings were the saddest of all to Gaud, on account of the gaiety seen in other places. There were joyful evening parties, even in these small forgotten hamlets of the coast. Here and there from some closed hut, beaten by the dark rain, issued sounds of loud singing. Within, tables were spread for the drinkers; sailors drying themselves by smoking fires; old men drinking their brandy; young men flirting with the girls,—all nearly tipsy, trying to drown their cares in mirthful songs. And close by, the sea, their grave of the morrow, was singing also, filling the night with its immense moaning.

On certain Sundays groups of young people, coming out of the taverns or returning from Paimpol, walked along the street by the Moans'

house. They were men that lived at the farthest end of the district, in the direction of Pors-Even. They passed on very slowly, heedless of getting wet, accustomed as they were to storms and surges. Gaud gave an ear to their songs and their shouts, quickly drowned in the roar of the wind and the waves, trying to distinguish Yann's voice and trembled all over when she imagined she recognized it.

It was very unkind of Yann not to come down to see them again, and lead a merry life so soon after Sylvestre's death ; all this was so unlike him. No, surely she could not understand this ;—and for all this she could not detach herself from him, nor think he was heartless.

The fact was, that since his return he had been leading a very dissipated life.

First they had made the usual round in the Gulf of Gascony. That is always a time of pleasure for the Icelanders, when they have a little money in their pockets to spend thoughtlessly (small sums advanced, which the captains give on account, their full share of the profits being payable in the winter.)

They had gone, as usual, to buy salt in the islands, and there in Saint-Martin-de-Ré, he had taken fancy again to a certain brunette, his mistress of the preceding autumn. Together they had walked in the last beams of the gay sun, along the ruddy vineyards filled with the songs of the lark, fragrant with ripe grapes, sand-pinks, and the sea smells from the shore ; together they had sung and danced the dances of the vintage season when one gets tipsy with an amorous and mild intoxication, drinking the sweet wine.

Afterward, the *Marie* having sailed as far as Bordeaux, he had found there again, in a large gilded café, the beautiful singer, the one who had given him the watch, and had carelessly allowed himself to adore her for another week.

Returning to Brittany in November, he attended to some weddings of friends as best man, always dressed in his handsome fête-day clothes, and often intoxicated after midnight at the end of the ball. Every week he experienced some new adventure of which the girls were very eager to inform Gaud with much exaggeration.

She had seen him, three or four times, in the

distance, coming toward her, over the road to Ploubazlanec, but always in time to avoid him ; and he too, at such times, took an opposite direction over the moor. As if by a mute understanding, they now shunned each other.

CHAPTER XIV.

THERE lives a big woman in Paimpol, named Tressoleur. In one of the streets leading to the wharves, she keeps a public house, well known to the Icelanders, where sea captains and ship-owners come to engage sailors, choosing the most hardy, while they drink together.

At one time pretty, still very dashing with the fishermen, she had a mustache now, the shoulders of a man and a bold manner. She carried the air of a canteen-woman under her white head-dress of a nun. In spite of everything there is a religious air about her, for she is a Breton woman.

She had the names of all the sailors of the neighborhood kept in her head, as in a register. She knew the good and the bad among them, knew how much they earned, and what they were worth.

One day, in January, Gaud, who had been sent

for to sew a dress for her, went there, working in a room adjoining the drinking-saloon.

People entered this tavern of Madame Tressoleur through a door with massive stone pillars, which recedes under the first floor, in the old style. When it is opened, a strong gust of wind, always blowing in the street, pushes against it, and the newcomers enter brusquely as if thrown in by a wave of the sea. The saloon is low and deep, whitewashed and decorated with pictures, in gilt frames, of ships, landing of vessels, and wrecks. In a corner, decked with artificial flowers, a Virgin in faïence stands on a console.

These walls have listened to many a sailor's song, and have witnessed many a sight of unbridled and coarse gaiety—beginning from the remote past of Paimpol, passing over the turbulent days of pirates, down to the Icelanders of our own times, scarcely different from their ancestors; and many lives have been staked there, and engaged, at these tables of oak, between two drinking bouts.

Gaud, while sewing the dress, gave ear to a conversation upon Icelandic subjects, which was

carried on behind the partition, between Madame Tressoleur and two frequenters of the place.

The old men were talking about a new fine boat, now being rigged in the harbor ; this *Léopoldine* would never be ready for the coming cruise.

"Oh, yes," retorted the hostess, "I am quite sure she will be ready, for, I tell you, she engaged her crew yesterday,—all the sailors on board the *Marie*, which is going to be sold and taken to pieces,—five young men, who were all engaged, in my presence, at this table, signing their contracts with my pen, now ! And what a set of fine fellows all of them are,—Laumec, Tugdual Caroff, Yvon Duff, son Keraez, from Tréguier ; and the tall Yann Gaos, from Pors-Even, who is worth any three !"

The *Léopoldine !* The name, hardly heard, of this boat, which was to take away Yann, became fixed at once in her mind as if it had been hammered in, to remain ineffaceably there.

Returning to Ploubazlanec she worked, in the evening, to finish her sewing by the light of her little lamp. While sitting, that same word was running in her mind all the time. the mere sound

of which impressed her as a sad thing. The names of persons, as well as those of vessels, have an individuality, one might almost say, a particular meaning of their own. And this *Léopoldine*, a new and unusual word, haunted her with a strange persistence, becoming a ghastly obsession. She had expected to see Yann depart again on board the *Marie*, which she had visited formerly and knew so well ; which had been under the protection of the Virgin, during long years of dangerous voyages. And now this change to the *Léopoldine* augmented her anguish.

But soon she said to herself that she should be indifferent to all this ; nothing that concerned him ought to affect her. After all, what could it possibly matter to her whether he was here or somewhere else, on board this vessel or another, at sea or ashore ? Ought she to feel more miserable or less so, because he was away in Iceland ; when the hot summer had returned back to the huts all deserted, left only to distressed and lonely women ; or even when another autumn commenced, bringing the fishermen once more back home ? To all this she was equally indifferent ;

she was hopeless and without any joy. There was no bond between them now, nothing could ever bring them together ; for had he not forgotten even poor little Sylvestre ? It was best to understand now that her only dream, her only desire in life, was over forever. She must tear herself from him, from everything that had to do with him ; even from the charm of the name of Iceland, which still made her heart vibrate because of him ; to drive away all these thoughts, to sweep everything ; to make up her mind that everything was over, over forever.

She tenderly looked at the sleeping old woman, who still needed her help, but would soon die. Then what would be the good of living, what would be the use of toiling, and what could she do ?

The western wind had again risen outside ; the patter of rain on the roofs mingled with the distant moaning. And tears also,—the tears of an orphaned and deserted girl, began to roll down, trickling over her lips with a bitter taste, and silently drop on her work, like summer showers brought by no breeze, but falling suddenly,

hurried and heavy, from overladen clouds. Now her eyes grew dim, she felt tired out ; and seized by a vertigo looking over this void in her life, she folded Dame Tressoleur's ample waist and went to bed.

She shivered as she stretched herself in her fine, elegant bed ; like everything in this hut, it was getting every day colder and damper. However, as she was very young, although still crying, she at last grew warm and fell asleep.

CHAPTER XV.

Several sad weeks had passed, and now it was the first of February with mild and fine weather.

Yann was coming out of the shipowner's place, having received his share in the proceeds of the last summer's fishing,—fifteen hundred francs. He was carrying it now to his mother, according to family custom. The season had been a good one, and he was walking along very satisfied.

Near Ploubazlanec he saw a crowd gathered by the side of the road; an old woman gesticulating with her stick, while street urchins mocked and laughed around her. She was Grandma Moan! . . . The good grandmother, whom Sylvestre adored so tenderly, all in rags and bedraggled, had become one of those imbecile women who are worried and ridiculed in the streets. This gave him a great pain.

These boys from Ploubazlanec had killed her

cat, and she, out of her head with anger and despair, was threatening them with her stick.

"Oh, if my poor lad were only here, surely you wouldn't have dared to do it, you little rascals!"

While running after them to catch and beat them, it appeared she had fallen, her cap was on one side, her dress all covered with mud; they called out to her that she was tipsy (as is so often the case with poor old Breton women, who have suffered much).

But Yann knew very well that this was not the case, that she was a respectable old woman, who drank nothing but water.

"Aren't you ashamed of yourselves?" he said to these wretches, his eyes furious with anger and a voice to be obeyed. And in a twinkling of the eye all the boys had disappeared, all abashed and confused by the tall Yann.

Gaud, who was just returning from Paimpol, carrying her work for the evening, had seen all from a distance, and recognizing her grandmother in the crowd, frightened, she came running to know what the trouble was; what they had done

to her; and, seeing the cat, which they had killed, she understood all.

She lifted her frank eyes to Yann, who did not turn his away. They did not think of avoiding each other this time; suddenly both were covered with blushes, the blood rushing to their cheeks; as they looked at each other, they were somewhat embarrassed finding themselves so near each other, but without hatred, almost with tenderness, united as they were in this common thought of pity and protection.

For a long time the schoolboys had had a grudge against this now dead tom-cat, for he had the black face of a devil on him; but, on the contrary, he was a very nice cat, and when seen near he was found to be very quiet and wheedling. They had stoned him to death, and one of the eyes was hanging out. The poor old woman, still muttering and threatening, walked along, all excited, tottering, carrying her dead cat like a rabbit by the tail.

"Oh, my poor boy, my poor boy! . . . if he were only living now, nobody would have dared to treat me so, no, surely, they wouldn't!"

Tears were rolling down in her wrinkles; and her hands, with thin, large, blue veins trembled.

Gaud arranged her grandmother's cap, and tried to comfort her with gentle, soothing words. Yann was indignant at the thought that children could be so wicked as to treat an aged woman like this. His eyes, too, were almost filled with tears; no, not on account of the dead cat,—young fellows like him, though fond of animals, are not sentimental enough to cry at their decease,—but he was touched in walking thus behind the aged woman, now in her second childhood, carrying her poor cat by the tail. He thought of Sylvestre who loved her so, and the terrible pain it would have caused him, if he had seen her end thus her last days in misery,—an object of derision.

Gaud excused herself, as if she was responsible for her appearance.

"She has fallen, that's why she looks so dirty," she said in a low voice, "it's true her dress is not very new, for we are not rich, Monsieur Yann. Yesterday I mended it; when I left her this morning she was clean and neat."

He gazed long at her, touched much more by this simple explanation than he would have been, if she had used clever words, reproachful and in tears. They continued to walk together drawing near Moans' hut. He had known her to be pretty, as no other girl was ; but she seemed to him now more beautiful in her poverty and mourning. His manner grew more and more serious, and his gray eyes took a more reserved expression, and seemed, in spite of that, to penetrate the deepest corners of the soul. Her figure, too, was more developed. She was now twenty-three years old, in the full bloom of her loveliness.

And, moreover, she looked now like a fisherman's daughter in her black dress and very plain cap, but you could not tell what gave her that ladylike appearance ; it was something hidden in her nature, and she could not be blamed for it. Perhaps it was her bodice that fitted her better than those of others, showing to advantage her full bust and her shoulders ; but, no, that was rather revealed in her quiet voice and in her gentle eyes.

CHAPTER XVI.

CERTAINLY he would accompany them perhaps as far as their home.

They walked, on, all three together, as if on their way to bury the cat, and it looked almost comical to see them pass as in a procession ; good people laughed at them standing before their doors. Old Yvonne in the middle carried the dead animal ; Gaud, on her right, agitated and still blushing ; the tall Yann, at her left, his head erect and pensive.

The poor aged woman became suddenly calm on the way. She herself straightened her cap, and, without saying a word, commenced to look alternately at them both with the corner of her eye, which had brightened up now.

Gaud was afraid to break the silence lest he would take his leave. She wanted to "bask in the beams" of the glance he had given her, to walk with closed eyes, to see nothing else, to

walk thus, at his side, for a long time, dreaming this beautiful dream, instead of hurrying quick to their cheerless house, where all was to vanish away.

At the door there was a moment of hesitation and indecision, when it seemed the heart would break and stop beating. The grandmother entered first without turning her head back; then Gaud, hesitating; and Yann, following them, entered also.

This was the first time in his life that he had ever been in their home, without any object, probably; what could he want? As he crossed the threshold he touched his hat, and then the first thing his eyes fell upon was the portrait of Sylvestre, with its little mortuary wreath of black beads. He walked toward it slowly, as if approaching a tomb.

Gaud remained standing, her hands on the table. He looked all around him, she following him while he made this sort of inspection of their poverty.

Very poor, indeed, was the home, of these two poor deserted women living together, in spite of

its orderly and neat appearance. Perhaps, at least, he would feel compassion for her, seeing her reduced to such misery, to these defaced walls, to this thatched roof. There was nothing left to her of her former splendor, but the white fine bed, and unwittingly Yann's eyes rested upon it.

He said nothing. . . . Why did he not go? The old grandmother, who was still sharp in her lucid moments, seemed not to notice him. So they remained before each other, silent and restless; finally, they looked at each other, a supreme question in their eyes.

But the moments were fleeting, and each second the silence between them grew more and more intense. And they long gazed at each other, as if in solemn expectation of something unheard of, which was slow in coming.

. . . . . .

"Gaud," he began in a low, grave voice, "if you are still willing——"

What was he going to say? . . . It could be guessed that he had come to a sudden decision, abruptly made, as was his custom, but he hardly dared to put it into words.

"If you are still willing. . . . The fish has sold well this year, and I have a little money ahead. . . ."

If she were still willing!. . . What was he asking of her? Had she heard aright? She was bewildered and crushed by the immensity of what she thought she understood.

And the old Yvonne was all attention in her corner, feeling the approach of happiness.

"We could be married, Mademoiselle Gaud, if you are still willing. . . ."

Then he waited for her answer, which did not come. What could prevent her telling this yes? He was surprised, he was frightened; and she perceived it. Resting her hands on the table, all pale, with eyes in a mist, she had become speechless, and looked like a lovely maid near her death.

"Well, Gaud, give him an answer!" said old grandmother, who was coming towards them. "You see, it took her unawares, Monsieur Yann; you must excuse her; she will think over it, an will answer you in a moment. Sit down, Monsieur Yann, and have a glass of cider with us."

But no, Gaud was unable to give an answer;

in her ecstasy words failed her. . . . It was true then that he was good, that he had a heart. Now she saw there the true Yann, and in spite of his hard nature, in spite of his brutal refusal, in spite of all, she had never ceased to see him as he really was. For a long time he had disdained her, but now he accepted her, now that she was poor. Doubtless he had had this intention all along, he must have had a reason for acting thus, which she would know later on. At the present moment she did not think of asking any account of all these things, or reproach him for all the chagrin of the last two years. . . . Besides, all that was forgotten; all seemed in a second carried away a long distance by the delightful whirlwind which now swept over her life! Still speechless, she told him of her adoration only with her swimming eyes, looking steadily at him, while tears began to flood down over her cheeks.

"Well, God bless you, my children!" said Grandmother Moan. "And I will always be thankful to Him, for I am contented to have lived to this old age to have been able to see you united thus before I die."

Still they stood there, one before the other, with clasped hands, but unable to find any word to utter. They did not know of any word sweet enough, any sentence worthy enough to break this delicious silence.

"At least, kiss each other, my children. . . . But see, they don't say a word! . . . Oh, dear me, what strange children I have here! . . . Come, Gaud, tell him something, my dear girl. In my time, when people were engaged, they used to kiss each other."

Yann took off his hat, at once seized by a nameless respect, as he bent over to kiss Gaud; and it seemed to him that this was the first real kiss that he had ever given in his life.

She also kissed him, pressing with all her soul her fresh lips, not used to the refinement of caresses, against her fiancée's cheek, bronzed by the sea. In the stone wall the cricket chirped its blessing,—being right for this time,—and the portrait of Sylvestre seemed to smile out of its black wreath; everything seemed to take a new life and joy in this wretched hut. The very silence was filled with heavenly music; even the pale twi-

light of winter entering in, through the window, was gleaming in a wonderful glow.

"Then on his return from Iceland we will have the wedding."

Gaud lowered her head. Iceland, the *Léopoldine*, it was all true ! She was already forgetting these dreadful things which arose on their way. On his return from Iceland. . . . How long that anxious summer waiting would seem ! Yann was drumming rapidly with his feet on the floor, being hard pressed and feverish. He counted the days to see whether, if they hurried, they could get married before his departure. So many days to have the papers made out, so many days for publishing the banns in the church,—that would bring them up to the 20th or the 25th of the month for the wedding; and, if nothing hindered them, they would still have a whole week for the honeymoon.

"I'm going to begin by telling to my father," and he was in such a great hurry, as if even the minutes of their life were numbered and precious.

PART FOURTH.

CHAPTER I.

Lovers always like to sit together on the seats in the doorways at nightfall.

Yann and Gaud also had this peculiarity. Every evening, on the stone-seat in front of Moans' house Gaud was courted by Yann.

Others have the springtime, the shade of trees, warm evenings and blooming flowers. They had nothing but the February twilight, which gleamed over this country by the sea, all rocks and thorn-broom, no green branches above their heads, nothing around them but the infinite sky, through which traversed slowly the wandering fog, and for flowers brown seaweed, which the fishermen coming from the beach had dragged along in the paths with their nets.

On account of the currents of the sea the winter is not very severe in this warm region; but

nevertheless the twilights often bring with them freezing dampness and imperceptibly fine rain which fell on their shoulders.

All the same they remained there, finding it very comfortable. And this bench, whose age numbered over a hundred, was not surprised at this love scene, having already witnessed so many others. It had listened, from generation to generation, to the same sweet words spoken by youthful lips; and it had also become used to seeing them return after a while to sit in the same place; now changed into hoary and trembling old people, —but this time in the daylight in order to breathe once more a little of the pure and fresh air, warming themselves in their last sunshine.

From time to time Grandma Yvonne would put her head out of the door to have a look at them, not because she was uneasy about what they were doing there alone, but merely from affection for the pleasure of seeing them, or also to make them come in.

"You will catch cold, my children," she would say, "you will get sick, *Ma Doué*, *Ma Doué*, I ask you if it is sensible to stay out so late."

Cold! . . . were they cold? In the open air they were conscious of only one thing, of the happiness of being so near each other.

That evening people passing through the street heard the soft murmur of two voices mingled with the roaring which the sea made at the foot of the cliffs. It made an exquisitely harmonious music, Gaud's silvery voice alternating with that of Yann, which had a sweet and caressing tone.

Their silhouettes also could be distinguished outlined on the granite wall against which they were leaning,—first, Gaud's white cap, then her slender form dressed in black, and alongside her the square shoulders of her sweetheart,—above rose the humpbacked straw-thatched roof, and as a background to all this the infinite twilight, the colorless void of the waters and the sky. . . .

Finally they went in to sit down by the fireplace; and the old Yvonne, who soon fell asleep, her head bent forward, did not much inconvenience this young couple who loved each other. They began to talk in a low voice, having to make up for the two years of silence. They had to hurry

on their courtship, because it was to be of so short duration.

They had decided to live with Grandma Yvonne, who had bequeathed her cottage to them in her will. For the present they would not make any alterations, and for want of time would postpone embellishing a little this poor nest, until Yann's return from Iceland.

CHAPTER II.

One evening he was amusing himself by enumerating a thousand little things that she had done, or which had happened to her since their first meeting; he even began to tell her about the dresses she had had, or the fêtes where she had been.

She listened to him very much surprised. How could he have known all this? Who would have imagined that he had ever paid any attention to these mere nothings, and that he was capable of remembering them all?

But he only smiled in a mysterious way, and told still smaller details, even things that she had herself forgotten.

She let him speak on, without more interruption, an unexpected rapturous transport swelling in her heart; she began to divine, to understand that he also had been in love with her all this time! She had been the constant object

of his thoughts; now he was confessing it so naïvely!

But what could have been his object? Why had she been rejected, and left to suffer and pine away?

She was all the time puzzled with this mystery, which he had promised to solve, and the explanation of which he always deferred, looking confused and smiling in an incomprehensible manner.

CHAPTER III.

One fine morning they went to Paimpol, with Grandmother Yvonne, to buy the wedding-gown.

Some of Gaud's many fine dresses, left from her better days, could be made over for the occasion, without her having to buy new ones; but Yann had wished to make her this present, and she could not refuse it. To have a dress given her, purchased with the money earned from his fishing, seemed to make her really his wife.

As Gaud was still in mourning for her father, they selected a black gown. But Yann found none of the goods that were shown them pretty enough. He was a little haughty with the clerks; and he who would not formerly, for anything in the world, enter the shops of Paimpol, paid to-day great attention to everything, even to the style in which the dress was to be made; he wished it trimmed with broad bands of velvet to make it more elegant.

CHAPTER IV.

One evening when they were sitting on the stone bench in the solitude of the cliff, when night was drawing near, their eyes rested, by chance, on a thorn-bush--the only one seen around, growing among the rocks, on the edge of the road. In the half obscurity they seemed to distinguish little white tufts on this bush.

"One would imagine it were in bloom," said Yann. And they went toward it to be sure of it.

They found it full of flowers. Unable to see distinctly, they touched it, to ascertain with their fingers the presence of these little blossoms, all moist with fog. And then a first impression of spring came over them; at the same time they perceived that the days were already getting longer, that the air was warmer, and the night somewhat more luminous.

But how this solitary bush had bloomed in advance of all others! Nowhere, along the road-

sides in the country, could be found one like it. Surely, it had blossomed there expressly for them, for the festival of their love. . . .

"Come, let us pick them!" said Yann.

And almost feeling his way he made a bouquet with his clumsy hands; then he placed it in her waist, after carefully removing the thorns with his big fisherman's knife, which he carried always in his belt.

"There, you are just like a bride now," he said, standing back as if to see, in spite of the darkness, whether it looked well on her.

Below them the sea, exceedingly calm, broke gently over the pebbles of the beach, with a small intermittent sound, as regular as breathing in sleep; it appeared to be indifferent, or even favorable to this love-making, which was going on so near.

In their anxious expectation for the evenings the days seemed to drag wearily; and then, when they parted as ten o'clock struck, they felt a little despondent because they were ended so soon.

They had to make haste, to hurry about the papers, about everything, for fear of not being

ready, and of letting their happiness escape them until the next autumn, until the uncertain morrow.

Their courtship, carried on in the evening in this gloomy place, amid the roar of the waves with feverish consciousness of the flight of time, received a fantastic appearance and a melancholy shade. Very serious, very uneasy about their love, they courted each other after their own fashion.

Still he did not say why he had treated her so for two years. This mystery tormented her after he had gone home for the night. Nevertheless, she was sure that he loved her dearly.

It was true that he had loved her all the time, but not so well as now. It increased in his heart, just as a tide rises and swells, until it overflows everything; he had never learned to love any one like this before.

From time to time he would stretch himself over the stone seat almost at full length, resting his head in her lap, with the wheedling of a child, wanting to be caressed, and then, for propriety's sake, he would very quickly straighten himself

up. He would have liked to lie down at her feet and remain there, with head against the hem of her dress. Outside the brotherly kiss he gave her when he came and when he went away, he never dared to embrace her. He adored the something invisible within her, which was her soul, and which manifested itself in the pure and tranquil sound of her voice, in the expression of her smile, in the clear and bewitching glance of her eyes. . . .

And to think that, at the same time, she was a woman of flesh, handsomer and more desirable than any other, and that she would soon belong to him completely, in an altogether different manner from all of his former loves!

CHAPTER V.

One rainy evening they were sitting side by side near the fireplace, and their grandmother was asleep opposite them. The flames danced among the dry twigs in the fireplace, and their shadows lengthened as far as the black ceiling.

Like all lovers, they were talking together in a low voice. But this evening their conversation was broken by long intervals of troubled silence. He, especially, said almost nothing, and bent his head with a faint smile, avoiding Gaud's glances. It was because she had been pressing him with questions all the evening about this mystery which he did not mean to explain to her; and this evening he felt himself caught. She was too shrewd and too determined to know; no subterfuge could help him out of this bad situation.

"Was it bad remarks that people made about me?" she asked.

He tried to answer "Yes." Bad remarks! oh

there had been enough of that made in Paimpol and Ploubazlanec.

She wanted to know what those remarks were; but, confused, he did not know what to say. Then she clearly saw that it must have been something else.

"Was it about my dress, Yann?"

Undoubtedly her dress had occasioned some remarks; for a time she had dressed too extravagantly to become the wife of a simple fisherman. But at last he was compelled to admit that that was not all.

"Was it because at that time we had the reputation of being rich, and you were afraid of being refused?"

"Oh, no, not that!"

He made this last answer in such a naïve self-confidence that Gaud was amused by it. Then there was another silence, and the roaring of the sea and the wind was heard outside.

While she observed him closely a new idea flashed upon her, and her expression changed slowly.

"It was not anything of the sort, Yann, what

was it?" she suddenly said, looking him straight in the eye, with the irresistible look of one who has guessed the truth.

And he turned his head away, laughing out loud. So that was it; she had at last found it out. He could not give her any reason, because he didn't have any, he had never had any. Well, yes, he had simply been wilful (as Sylvestre once had said), and that was all. But then, he had been plagued so much about Gaud! Everybody took some part in it,—his parents, Sylvestre, his Iceland companions, and even Gaud herself. So he had begun to say no, and had kept on saying no, cherishing always the thought in the depths of his heart that some day, when everybody had ceased to think about it, it would surely end by being yes.

And it was out of Yann's childish caprice that Gaud had languished, forsaken for two years, and had longed to die.

After the first impulse, which had been to laugh from confusion at being discovered, Yann looked at Gaud gravely with his gentle eyes, questioning seriously, in his turn, whether she would forgive

him. He felt much remorse for having grieved her so sorely, would she forgive him?

"That is in my nature," he said, "at home with my parents it's the same thing. Sometimes when I am in a fit of obstinacy I remain a week as if angered with them, scarcely speaking to anybody; and yet, you know how dearly I love them. At last I obey their wishes much as a ten-year-old boy. Do you believe that I was reluctant to get married? No, even if it were so, you may be sure, it could not have lasted very long."

Oh, how she forgave him! She felt the tears trickle gently down her cheeks. It was the last of her former troubles vanishing away with this confession of her Yann. Moreover, without her past suffering, the present hour would not have been half so delicious; now, that it was all over, she almost liked it better to have gone through those days of trial.

Now everything was cleared up between them, in a complete, though unexpected manner.

The veil hanging between these two souls was torn asunder. He drew her toward him, into his

arms, and their heads together, cheek against cheek, they remained thus a long time, no more in need of any words to express themselves to one another. And as at this moment Grandmother Yvonne woke up, they remained as they were, without any embarrassment, so chaste was their embrace!

CHAPTER VI.

It was six days before their departure for Iceland. Their wedding procession started from the church of Ploubazlanec, pursued by a furious wind, under a lowering and black sky.

Both of them were very handsome, as they walked arm in arm, like a king and a queen, at the head of their suite, as if walking in a dream. Calm, reserved, and grave, they seemed to see nothing, dominating over life; to exist above everything. They were respected even by the wind, while the cortége coming behind was a jolly medley of laughing couples harassed by the wild western gale. There were many young people overflowing with life; others, already turned gray, were smiling, recalling their own wedding days and their younger days. Grandma Yvonne was also there following them, feeling faint but very happy, leaning on the arm of an old uncle of Yann's, who made old-fashioned com-

pliments. She wore a nice new head-dress, bought for the occasion, and she had still the same little shawl, dyed for the third time, black, on account of Sylvestre.

And the wind plagued all the guests without distinction ; skirts were lifted, dresses turned up, hats and caps tossed about.

At the church entrance the newly married couple had bought, according to custom, bouquets of artificial flowers, to complete their holiday attire. Yann stuck it on his massive chest, but he was one of those men to whom everything is becoming. While Gaud had still a very ladylike appearance, with those poor big flowers, placed in her bodice, which was very close fitting to her exquisite form, as of old.

The fiddler at the head of the procession, vexed by the wind, played wretchedly. The music reached their ears in puffs, and in the noisy gusts of wind it sounded small and comical, shriller than the cries of sea-gulls.

All Ploubazlanec had turned out to see them. This marriage had caused a sensation and many had come from afar. At every turn of the road

they were gathered in groups to see them pass; almost all the Icelanders in Paimpol, Yann's friends, were stationed along the road. They saluted the couple as they passed; Gaud responded to their greetings by gently bowing, so much like a lady, with a noble grace; and all along the route she was the object of admiration.

All the hamlets in the neighborhood, even those in the depths of the woods, were emptied of their beggars, cripples, madmen, and idiots, all on crutches. These wretches were ranged on the line of march, with accordions and hurdy-gurdies. They held out their hands, wooden bowls, or hats, to receive the alms Yann threw to them with his grand look and Gaud with her queenly smile. Among these beggars were many old men, with gray hair on their empty skulls, which never held much. Crouching in the hollows of the road they were of the same color as the earth from which they had sprung and to which they would return soon; but no thought of it ever troubled their minds. Their staring eyes were puzzling like the mystery of their abortive and useless life. They watched the passage of this festive group

full of magnificent life, without comprehending it. . . .

They continued their march beyond the hamlet of Pors-Even, beyond the Gaoses' house. Following the traditional custom of bridal couples in Ploubazlanec, they were going to the chapel of La Trinité, at the end of the Breton region.

At the foot of the last cliff, it stands on a threshold of low rocks, very close to the waters, and seems already to belong to the sea. A goat-path leads down to it through granite bowlders. The bridal party spread among the rocks, over the slope of this isolated cape, their joyful and complimentary words being lost in the din made by the wind and the waves.

It was impossible to reach the chapel. In this furious weather the path was not safe; the sea was very near with its roaring billows. It sprang in white sheaves up in the air and spread out, as if it would inundate everything.

Yann, who was ahead of the rest, with Gaud on his arm, was the first to retreat before the spray. Behind, the procession was arranged on the rocks, in a semicircle, and it seemed to him that he had

come there to present his wife to the sea, which gave her a scowling look.

Turning around, he saw the fiddler perched on a gray rock, trying in vain, between two gusts of wind, to play his *contre danse.*

"Stop your music, my friend," he said to him, "the sea is giving us a livelier tune than yours."

At the same time a heavy, splashing rain, which had threatened them since morning, began to pour down. Then there was a wild confusion, with screaming and laughter, as they rushed up the cliff to take shelter in the Gaoses' house.

CHAPTER VII.

THEY had the wedding dinner at the house of Yann's parents, because Gaud's home was so wretched.

It took place up-stairs, in the fine new room. Twenty-five persons sat at table around the newly-wedded pair,—his sisters and brothers; Cousin Gaos, the pilot; Guermeur, Keraez, Yvon Duff, all who formerly were on board the *Marie* and who now were to sail on the *Léopoldine*. There were also four lovely maids-of-honor, their braids of hair curled above their ears, like old Byzantine empresses, with their caps, after the new fashion for young girls, in the form of a sea-shell. There were also four best men, all Icelanders, square-built, with handsome, fiery eyes.

Down-stairs they were cooking and eating. The rest of the procession were packed full in there in great disorder; and the women from Paimpol

were losing their heads before the great fireplace, crowded with saucepans and pots.

It is true, Yann's parents would have wished a richer wife for their son, but Gaud was known to be a good, courageous girl ; and then as a compensation for her lost fortune, she was the handsomest girl in the whole district ; and they were highly gratified to see them so well suited to each other.

The old father, full of gaiety, after the soup was served, was telling about this marriage : "More Gaoses will be coming, of whom there is no lack now in Ploubazlanec."

And, counting on his fingers, he was explaining to an uncle of the bride how it happened that there were so many Gaoses in the world. His father, who was the youngest of nine brothers, had had twelve children, all married with their cousins, and all these had resulted in more Gaoses, in spite of those who had been swallowed by Iceland.

"As for myself," he added, "I married a relative, and we have fourteen children."

And at the thought of this tribe, he rejoiced, shaking his white head.

Goodness! what a hard time he had had to bring up these fourteen little Gaoses; but now they were well out of it; especially, because the ten thousand francs realized from the wreck had put them in easy circumstances.

Neighbor Guermeur, also, was telling in many a jest about the days he had passed in the service, —stories of the Chinese, of the Antilles, and of Brazil, and the young men who expected to go there were listening with sparkling eyes.

One of his lively experiences happened one time on board the *Iphigénie*, when they were storing the wine room, in the evening, at dusk; the leather pipe through which the wine flowed burst. Now, instead of fixing it, they began to drink to their full. This festivity lasted for two hours, till the whole battery was used up and everybody was drunk!

And these old sailors, seated at the table, laughed merrily like children, with a little touch of jealousy. "People grumble against the service," they said, "but there is nothing like it to have such fun."

Outside, the weather did not change; a fierce

rain-storm was raging in the dark night. In spite of the precautions they had taken, some felt uneasy about their boats, anchored in the harbor, and talked of leaving to see after them.

At the same time a still gayer noise was heard, coming from below, where the young people were dining, crowded one over the other. It was the shout of joy, the roar of laughter, from the little cousins who began to feel the effects of the cider. They had served boiled meats, roasts, chickens, several dishes of fish, omelets and pancakes.

They had chatted about fishing and smuggling, discussed every sort of tricks to escape the custom-house people, who, as everybody knows, are sworn enemies of seamen.

. . . . . .

The weather grew worse and worse, the windows were rattling ; one of their number left the place to look after his boat. The wind howled in the chimney like a spirit in suffering ; from time to time, it shook with a tremendous force the house to its rocky foundations.

"One would think it were angry because we are amusing ourselves," said the pilot cousin.

"No; it is the sea that is discontented," replied Yann, smiling at Gaud, "for I promised to marry it."

However, a strange sort of a languor crept over both of them. They spoke in a whisper, with clasped hands, isolated amid all the gaiety of the rest. Well aware of the effects of wine, Yann refrained from drinking that evening.

Sometimes he felt sad as he suddenly thought of Sylvestre. . . . It was agreed that they would not have any dancing out of respect for him, as well as for Gaud's father.

They were at dessert; soon the singing would begin. But, first, prayers were to be said for the deceased members of the family. They never failed in performing this religious duty. And when they saw Father Gaos rise, and uncover his white head, silence prevailed everywhere.

"This," he said, "is for Guillaume Gaos, my father." And, making the sign of the cross, he began the Latin prayer for the dead,—

"*Pater noster, qui es in cœlis, santificetur nomen tuum.* . . ."

Silence, as in a church, reigned everywhere

now, even down-stairs, on the tables of the little ones. Everybody in the house repeated to himself the same everlasting words.

"This is for Yves and Jean Gaos, my brothers, lost in the sea of Iceland. . . . This is for Pierre Gaos, who was shipwrecked on board the *Zelic*. . . ."

Then when all of the Gaoses had each had their prayer, he turned toward Grandma Yvonne.

"This," he told, "is for Sylvestre Moan."

And he said still another. Then Yann wept.

". . . *Sed libera nos a malo. Amen.*"

Afterward the singing began ; they sang songs learned in the *service*, on the forecastle, where, as is well known, there are many fine singers :

" Un noble corps, que celui des zouaves,
Mais chez nous les braves
Narguent le destin
Hurrah ! hurrah ! vive le vrai marin ! "

The couplets were sung by one of the best men in such a languishing tone that went to the heart ; then the chorus was taken up by other fine voices.

But to the newly-married couple all this sounded as if coming from a far distance. When they

gazed at each other, their eyes sparkled with a hazy brightness. They spoke lower and lower, still hand in hand; and Gaud would often bend her head, being seized little by little by a great and delicious dread in the presence of the master of her happiness.

Now the pilot cousin went around the table to fill the glasses with a certain wine of his, which he had brought with great caution, hugging the bottle, which was on his side, and not to be shaken, he said.

He told the history of this wine: One day while fishing they saw a cask float alone on the water. It was so bulky that it was impossible to get it on their boat; so they had opened it on the sea, filling all the pots they had on board. They could not possibly take it all; they signaled to the other pilots and fishermen, and every boat in sight gathered around this godsend.

"And there was more than one who was drunk when he returned to Paris—even that evening."

Still the wind continued its deafening uproar.

Down-stairs the children were dancing; many of the younger Gaoses had gone to bed; but the

others were playing the devil, led by little Fantec and Laumec, who insisted to go outdoors, and every minute opened the door, when furious gusts of wind would rush in, blowing out the candles.

The pilot cousin finished the story of the wine. According to his account, he himself had had forty bottles of it. He begged them not to say anything about it, being in dread of the commissioner of the maritime inscription for not having informed the authorities of this discovery.

"But I must look after these bottles," he said. "If it had been racked, it would have become a very superior wine; for there was certainly more juice of the grape in it than in the cellars of all the dealers in Paimpol."

Who could tell where this shipwrecked wine came from? It was strong and ruddy, mixed a good deal with sea-water, and had a salty taste. Nevertheless, they thought it very good, and many bottles were emptied.

Their heads were in a whirl, the tone of their voices was confused, and the boys kissed the girls.

They continued their merry songs, but they

had lost the ease of mind to sup; and the men changed anxious glances on account of the terrible storm which, instead of abating, seemed to increase in fury.

Outside, the uproar was growing worse. It seemed like one continuous, swelling, menacing cry, uttered by thousands of enraged beasts howling with all their might with outstretched necks.

They imagined to hear the distant heavy reports of marine guns,—it was the sea beating the coast of Ploubazlanec on every side. No, it was not at all satisfied; and Gaud felt her heart break as she listened to this uproarious music, which nobody had ordered for their wedding.

Toward midnight, during a lull, Yann, rising, quietly beckoned to his wife to come and speak to him.

He wanted to go home. She blushed, confused at leaving the table. Then she said that it would not be polite to go away and leave the others.

"No," replied Yann. "Father has permitted it. We may go."

And he took her away.

They furtively stole out.

Suddenly they found themselves outside, in the cold, in the appalling wind, in the roaring and dark night. They started to run hand in hand. From the path on the top of the cliff one could feel the distant, far-stretching sea, from which all these noises sprung, though unable to see it. Lashed in the face, fighting the wind with their breasts, they ran together, often obliged to turn about, carrying their hands to their mouths to catch their breath, cut off by the wind.

At first he supported her, his hands around her waist, to prevent her from putting the pretty shoes in all the water on the ground. Then he took her up in his arms and continued to run still faster. . . . He never thought that he loved her so much! And to think that she was twenty-three and he twenty-eight, and that they might have been married two years before and as happy as on this evening!

At last they reached their poor little, damp house, with its thatched, mossy roof; and they lighted a candle, after it was blown out twice by the wind.

Grandma Moan, who had returned home before

the singing, was there in her bunk since two hours, the doors of which she had closed. They approached it respectfully and peeped through the opening in the door, to bid her "good night" if she happened to be awake. Her eyes were closed, she was asleep, or, perhaps, she pretended to be so, in order not to trouble them.

Now they felt to be alone together.

He leaned over her to kiss her lips, but Gaud turned them away, pressing them against Yann's cheek, which was cold by the icy wind.

Very poor, very mean, was this hut, and it was very cold. Ah, if Gaud had been rich as before, what a pleasure they would have had in fixing up a nice room, in place of this one on the bare ground.

She was not yet quite accustomed to those walls of rough stones and the clumsy appearance of the furniture. But her Yann was there near her ; so everything was changed by his presence, and she had no eyes for anything but him.

Houhou ! . . . Houhou ! . . . The wind trembling with rage now howled dismally ; then again repeated, in a very low tone, the same menace,

with a refined malice, with little cries like the shrill voice of an owl.

And the great tomb of the sailors was near by, rolling, devouring, and beating the cliffs with the same heavy sound. Some night or other he would fall a prey to it, he would fight against it, and would be beaten by gloomy and freezing objects,—and they knew this well.

But what does it matter! They were for the time on shore, sheltered from the frenzy of the elements, which wasted on itself.

CHAPTER VIII.

THEY were husband and wife for six days. At this time of departure for Iceland, everybody was busy making preparations. Working women were piling up salt for the brine in the holds of the vessels ; the men were adjusting the riggings. At the home of Yann, his mother and sisters were busy sewing the oilskins and the *suroits* and the complete outfit for the coming cruise. The weather was gloomy and the sea was swelling and agitated, conscious of the approaching equinox.

All these inexorable preparations filled Gaud with anguish. She counted the fleeting hours of the days, waiting for the evening when she could have her Yann all to herself.

Would he every year go away like this ? She hoped to keep him with her, but she did not dare to tell him as yet. However he loved her fondly. He had never felt like this before : nothing like

it had ever taken hold of his heart. No, this was something different. It was a confiding and fresh tenderness ; her kisses were quite a different thing.

To find Yann so gentle and so childlike was a charming surprise to her, he, who formerly had been so scornful to the girls of Paimpol. With her, on the contrary, he always showed that same courtesy, so natural to him ; she adored the smile that always lighted up his face whenever he caught sight of her. Among this simple people there is an innate respect for the majesty of the wife.

Disquieting thoughts disturbed her mind, in her, this great happiness, which seemed to her too good to be true, uncertain as a dream.

In the first place, would this love of Yann last very long ? . . . Sometimes, as she recalled his old loves and passions and his adventures, she grew apprehensive. Would he still cherish the same infinite tenderness for her, the same gentle respect ?

Really, six days of married life for a love like theirs was nothing, nothing but a feverish bit of

happiness snatched from their future life, which might still be very long ahead of them. They had hardly seen each other, spoken to one another, or realized that they belonged to each other. And all their projects for living together, the peaceful happiness, and household management, had to be postponed until his return.

Oh, she must prevent him, at any cost, from sailing to Iceland in the future! But how to do it? and how could they support themselves when neither of them was rich? And then he loved the life on the sea so much! . . .

Next time, in spite of everything, she would try to keep him at home, she would use all her intelligence, affection, and will-power, to reach that end. What a prospect, to be the wife of an Icelander, to watch with sadness the approach of the spring, to pass the summer in a feverish anxiety,—now that she adored him beyond anything she had ever imagined, she was filled with great fear, when she thought of the coming years.

They had one beautiful spring day,—just one. It was the day before the sailing. The riggings on board had been put in order and Yann passed

all that day with her. They walked arm in arm, along the roads, like two lovers, close together, telling a thousand little things to each other. Good people smiled as they watched them pass by.

"It's Gaud, with tall Yann from Pors-Even. . . . They have been just married!"

It was a real spring day, this last day of theirs. It was strange and peculiar to have suddenly such calm weather and not a cloud over the sky, usually so troubled. Not a breath of wind in the air. The pale blue sea slumbered peacefully, stretching in the distance. The sun shone with a white brilliant light, and this wild Breton land was brightened up with it as if it was something beautiful and rare; it seemed overflowing with new joy and new life, even to its remotest parts. The air was pervaded with a delicious languor, reminding one of summer, and one would think this was to last forever, and that it was not possible to have again dark and sad days, or tempestuous weather. The capes, the bays over which no longer hovered the shadows of clouds, were now clearly outlined in the sunshine; they

also seemed to remain in a state of calmness which was never to end. One would imagine that all these were meant to make their festivity of love sweeter and more enduring; and early flowers blossomed here and there,—primroses along the ditches and violets with no perfume.

Gaud was asking,—

"How long will you love me, Yann?"

Greatly astonished, he replied, looking her straight in the face, with his beautiful, frank eyes:—

"Why, Gaud, as long as I live."

And these words, uttered by his lips, expressed the true sense of eternity.

She was leaning on his arm. In the enchantment of a realized dream, she pressed close against him, still very anxious, regarding him like a fugitive sea-bird. To-morrow he would fly away out on the sea! This time it was too late; she could do nothing to prevent this parting.

From the pathway on the cliffs where they were walking there can be had a fine view of all the country around, which was covered with short thorn-broom and strewn with stones. The houses

of the fishermen stood here and there over the rocks, with their old granite walls and thatched roofs very high and crooked, covered with newly-grown moss; and further away in the distance stretched the sea like a diaphanous vision, outlining its immense and endless circle, which seemed to envelop everything.

She was amusing herself by telling him about the marvelous and astonishing things in Paris, where she had once lived; but he, very scornful, was not interested in them.

"So far away from the coast," he said, "and so much land, so much land! . . . It must be unhealthy there. So many houses, so many people! . . . They must have much sickness in those cities. I am sure I wouldn't like to live there myself." And she smiled at this, being amazed to see this big fellow so naïve and childlike.

Sometimes they made their way down the valley, where real trees were growing, which seemed to lie flat before the wind from the sea. There no view greeted their eyes; dead leaves lay in heaps on the ground, cold with dampness; the hollow path, bordered on both sides with green furze,

was darkened under the branches, then it grew narrower between the huts of some solitary hamlet, crumbling with age. And some crucifix would always stand erect before them among the dry branches, with its worm-eaten image of Christ, like a corpse, His face distorted with a never-ending pain.

Then the path led them again to higher ground, which overlooked immense horizons, where their faces were fanned by the fresh breezes from the sea.

He, in his turn, was now telling about Iceland and its pale summers without nights ; about the low-hanging sun, which never set. Gaud did not understand all this perfectly, so he began to explain.

"The sun goes round and round, continuously," he said, stretching his arm over the distant circle of the blue waters. "It always remains very low, near the horizon ; for, you see, it has not the strength to rise any higher. About midnight it dips its edge a little in the sea, but soon it climbs up again to make the round of the heavens. Sometimes the moon also is seen at the

other end of the sky. They toil on both together, each in its own quarter, and they cannot be distinguished from each other, for in those regions they look very much alike."

To watch the sun at midnight! How far away this Iceland must have been! And the fiords? Gaud had seen this word inscribed, often and often, with the names of the dead, in the chapel of shipwrecked sailors. It sounded portentous to her ears.

"The fiords," answered Yann, "are large bays, like this one of Paimpol, for example, with the difference that high, very high, mountains rise around it, so high that nobody can see where they end, on account of the clouds that crown their peaks. I assure you, Gaud, it's a very melancholy land. Rocks, rocks, everywhere, nothing but rocks, and the inhabitants of the island haven't any idea about trees. Towards the middle of August, when our fishing is brought to an end, it is high time to start for home; for then the nights begin, and they lengthen very quickly; the sun sinks behind the horizon as if unable to rise, and they have continuous night during the

whole winter. And then," he went on, "on the coast of one of the fiords, there is a little cemetery, very much like the one at home, for the Paimpol people who die during the fishing season, or disappear at sea. It is on sacred ground, just as here in Pors-Even, and the deceased there have wooden crosses, like the ones we have here, with their names written on them. The two Goazdion, from Ploubazlanec, have a resting-place there, also Guillaume Moan, the grandfather of Sylvestre."

She imagined she could see this little cemetery at the foot of desolate bare rocks, under the rosy gleam of a never-ending daylight. Then she thought of those poor dead lying under the ice, wrapped with the black winding-sheet of the long winter nights.

"Do you fish all the time," she asked, "taking no rest?"

"Yes, always; but then there is the management of the vessel, for the sea is not always calm. Heavens! one feels tired in the evening, and that gives an appetite for the supper, and some days how we devour it!"

"And you never get tired of it?"

"Never!" he said, with such a tone of conviction that made her feel faint. "On board, on the wide sea, the time never drags, never!"

She lowered her head, feeling very sad, vanquished by the sea. She lowered her head, her heart full of misgivings, realizing how poor a rival she was with the sea!

PART FIFTH.

CHAPTER I.

At the end of that spring day which they had had, the falling night brought back the feeling of winter and they went in to dine in front of their crackling fire. And this was their last dinner together! But they had still a whole night to pass in each other's company, and this expectation prevented them being sad quite yet. After dinner they enjoyed once more a little of the sweet impression of spring, as they took the road to Pors-Even. The air was calm, almost warm, and the twilight still lingered over the country.

They were on a visit to their parents, for Yann to take leave of them, and returned home early to sleep, with the intention to rise at day-break.

CHAPTER II.

THE next morning the quay of Paimpol was full of people. The departure of the Icelanders had begun for two days, and at each tide a new group made for the open sea. This morning fifteen vessels were to sail with the *Léopoldine*, and the wives or the mothers of these sailors were all present to see them off. Gaud was surprised to find herself among them, become herself now an Icelander's wife, and brought there for the same fatal reason. In a few days her destiny had rushed on so precipitately that she had hardly had time to fully realize the facts. Gliding with an irresistible rapidity over a declivity, she had come to this crisis, to which she ought to submit now,—like so many others she must get accustomed to this sort of things.

She had never taken part in these scenes, in these leave-takings; all this was new and unknown to her. Among these women there were

none to be her equal. She felt isolated, different from them. Her past life of a *demoiselle*, which was still to be noticed in her manner, separated her from them.

The weather had remained fine on this day of their separation. But in the offing a heavy fog rising in the west predicted wind, and far off in the distance they could see the sea waiting for all these people breaking outside.

Around Gaud there stood others who were quite as pretty as herself and very touching with their eyes full of tears. There were also some others, heedless and laughing, who had no heart, or who for the moment loved no one. Old women, feeling themselves so very near death, wept as they took leave of their sons; lovers held each other in long embraces; tipsy sailors were heard singing to drive away sad thoughts, while others boarded their vessels with a terror-stricken look on their faces as if going straight to their death. Now some cruel sights presented to the eyes: some unfortunate sailors, who had been deceitfully persuaded to sign their contracts some day in a tavern, were now forced

to embark. They were pushed along by their own wives and by the guards. Others, whose resistance was feared on account of their strength, had been made intoxicated, by way of precaution; they were carried on stretchers and placed like so many corpses in the holds of the vessels.

Gaud, seeing them go by, was frightened. What sort of companions Yann was going to live with! What an awful thing this life of the Icelanders must be to inspire men with such a dread!

However, there were many other sailors who were happy and smiling, who, like Yann, loved the life on the sea and these great fishing expeditions. They were good, noble-looking, handsome fellows. If they were single, they went away easy in mind, casting a last glance at the girls; if married, they embraced their wives and their little ones with a sad tenderness and great expectations of returning back to them richer. Gaud felt somewhat reassured seeing that they were all like this on board the *Léopoldine*, whose crew was made up of picked men.

The boats started by twos and by fours, towed outside by tug-boats, and as they cleared away, the sailors, uncovering their heads, sang at the top of their voices the hymn to the Virgin, "Hail Star of the Sea!" and on the quay the women's hands waved a last farewell while the tears rolled down on the muslin bands of their caps.

As soon as the *Léopoldine* had started, Gaud marched in a rapid pace toward the Gaoses' house. After an hour and a half walk along the coast, by the familiar road of Ploubazlanec, she arrived to her new home at the farthest end of the region.

The *Léopoldine* had to cast anchor in the roadstead, opposite Pors-Even, and would not sail definitely before the evening; it was there that they had decided for their last meeting. In fact he came back in the ship's yawl; he came back to pass a few more hours together before sailing. On shore, all clear from fog, it was always the same beautiful spring weather,—the same peaceful sky. They walked arm in arm along the road for a while. This made them recall their walk of the previous day, only the night would no longer find them together. They moved on aimlessly.

turning back in the direction of Paimpol. Soon they found themselves near their home, led there mechanically without thinking about it. They went in for the last time, and Grandmother Yvonne was startled to see them coming back together. Yann gave Gaud a few directions in regard to various small things he had left in their closet, especially for his fine wedding clothes,—to unfold and air them occasionally. (On board the war-vessels sailors learn to be careful in these kind of things.) And Gaud smiled, seeing him so intelligent, and yet he could rest assured that everything that belonged to him would be cared for tenderly. However, these preoccupations were almost indifferent to them. They talked merely for the sake of talking,—to deceive themselves. . . .

Yann told that on board the *Léopoldine* they had just drawn lots for their fishing-posts and that he was very glad to have won one of the best. He had to explain this to her, who knew next to nothing about the ways of the Icelanders.

"You see, Gaud," he said, "on the gunnels of our vessels there are holes made in certain places

which are called *trous de mecques;* in these we place our line-holders with their reels, through which we pass our lines. So, before sailing, we draw numbers shaken up in the cabin-boy's cap. Every one gets one, and during the cruise no one has the right to put his line anywhere else ; each one keeps his own place. Well, my post is in the stern of the vessel, which, as you ought to know, is the place where the most fish are caught ; and then it's near the main shrouds, where always can be fastened a piece of canvas, an oil-skin, to make a sort of little shelter to protect the face from the snow and hail. This is of great service, you understand, during the bad squalls ; the skin does get not much burned, and the eyes can much longer see clearly."

They were talking in a very low voice, as if afraid to scare away the moments remaining to them, to make the time fly quicker. Their conversation had the nature of something which is doomed to end irretrievably. The most insignificant nothings they were saying to each other seemed to impart to this day a mysterious character.

At the last moment Yann took his wife in his arms, closely clasping her on his breast, in one long silent embrace.

He sailed away. The gray sails were unfurled to catch the light breeze now rising in the west. She could still distinguish him, as he waved his cap in a manner they had agreed upon. For a long time she saw her Yann, a mere silhouette on the sea, moving away from her. He could be still perceived, a black speck on the ashy blue of the waters, now vague, lost in the distance, where her eyes, still persisting in fastening themselves, became blurred and could see no more.

As the *Léopoldine* was getting more and more distant, Gaud, drawn as by a magnet, followed it along the foot of the cliffs in the same direction.

She was soon obliged to stop, because the sea confronted her. Then she sat at the foot of the last huge cross, which stood erect among the furze and the rocks. From this elevated point the sea seemed to rise higher in the far distance; and one would think that, as the *Léopoldine* moved away, it rose gradually, like a mere straw

on the slopes of this immense circle. The waters had big slow undulations,—like the final result of some dreadful storm raging somewhere else behind the horizon; but as far as the eyes could reach, where Yann was still seen, everything remained quiet.

Gaud gazed on steadily, trying to fix well in her memory the form of this vessel—the outline of its sails and riggings—that she might recognize it at a distance on its return, when she would be waiting for it.

Big waves continued to arrive from the west regularly, one following the other, with no pause, renewing their futile attempts, breaking over the same rocks, bursting into foam in the same spots and washing over the same shores. And in the long run, this dull agitation of the waters looked somehow uncanny, with the serenity of the sky and the air; it seemed as though the bed of the sea, being full to the brim, wanted to overflow and encroach upon the shore.

Meanwhile, the *Léopoldine* was growing smaller and smaller, and more distant and lost from view. Undoubtedly currents hurried it along;

because this evening the breeze was blowing very gently and yet it sped on fast.

Reduced to a small gray speck, almost to a point, it was soon to reach the extreme end of the circle of visible objects and pass to the infinite expanse, stretching yonder where darkness commenced its sway.

At seven o'clock in the evening, as night crept on, the vessel disappeared; and Gaud, at last summoning some courage, went back to her home, spite of the tears that rolled down her cheeks. How different and how much sadder would seem the void if she had parted now also, like the two other years, even without an adieu! While now everything was changed and mitigated; her Yann was so much to her! She felt herself so much adored in spite of his departure, that, when returning all alone to her room, she, at least, had the consolation and the delicious expectation of that *au revoir* they had bid each other for the autumn.

CHAPTER III.

THE summer passed,—gloomy, warm and quick. She waited for the first yellow leaves, the first gatherings of swallows, and the blossoming of the chrysanthemums.

She wrote to him several times by the packet-boats from Reikiawik and by the *chasseurs;* but one never can tell if those letters reach to their destination.

At the end of July she received one from him. He informed her that he was in excellent health at the date of the writing, the tenth of the month, that the fishing had begun in good shape, and that he had already fifteen hundred fish for his share. From beginning to the end the letter was written in simple words, phrased like so many others, sent by the Icelanders to their families. People brought up like Yann altogether discard the style of writing about the thousand and one things they feel, think, and dream.

Being more cultivated than he, she made up for it by reading between the lines a profound tenderness which had not been worded. Very often, in the four pages of the letter, he called her with the name of "wife," as if he was fond of repeating it. And, besides the mere address:—*To Madame Marguérite Gaos, the Moans' house in Ploubazlanec*—was something so pleasing that she read it over and over with great joy. She had had as yet so little time to be addressed as *Madame Marguérite Gaos!*

CHAPTER IV.

She worked hard during the summer months. The Paimpol women, who at first doubted her ability as an improvised work-woman, thinking her hands too much like a lady's, had found that, on the contrary, she excelled in making their dresses which showed their figures to advantage ; so she had almost become a renowned dressmaker.

All she earned was spent to furnish and embellish their rooms for his return. The closet, the berthlike beds were repaired and polished with shining metal-work ; she had put new glass and fine curtains in the window overlooking the sea ; she had purchased a new blanket for the winter, a table and a few chairs.

All this was accomplished without touching the money Yann had left to her at parting, and which she kept intact, in a tiny Chinese box, to show it to him on his return.

During the long summer evenings, in the last rays of the sun, seated in the doorway with Grandma Yvonne, whose mind and ideas were getting brighter in the warm season, she was busy knitting a sailor's sweater of blue wool for Yann ; on the edge of the collar and the sleeves there were marvels of cut-work stitches. Grandma Yvonne, who had formerly been an expert in knitting, was now beginning to recall the different patterns used in her younger days, and which she taught now to Gaud. To finish this large sweater it required a great deal of wool.

The days grew now shorter, especially the evenings ; certain plants, having bloomed in July, began to turn yellow, as if dying ; and the violet-colored flea-bane was blossoming again by the roadside, but this time smaller and with longer stems.

Finally the last days of August arrived and the first Iceland vessel was sighted one evening off the cape of Pors-Even. The festivities of the fishermen's return had commenced. People hurried in groups over the cliffs to give it a warm reception. Which one was it ?

It was the *Samuel Azénide*,—this one was always the first to reach home.

"To be sure," was saying Yann's old father, "the *Léopoldine* also will soon arrive ; out there, I know, when one starts for home, the others cannot stay behind much longer."

CHAPTER V.

THE Icelanders were returning,—two the next day, four the day following, and a dozen the succeeding week. And they brought back to their country joy and happiness ; and there was great rejoicing in their homes, with their wives and mothers, great feasting also in the taverns, where the lovely Paimpol girls served drinks to the fishermen.

There were ten which had not yet reached port, and *Léopoldine* was one of them. Further delay was not possible ; and Gaud, at the thought that Yann would soon reach her—even allowing a week for his delay to avoid disappointment—was in a delicious fever of expectation, keeping their house in order, very neat and tidy for his arrival.

Having arranged everything, nothing was left for her to do ; and, moreover, in her great impatience it was hard for her to think of anything else.

Three of the overdue vessels arrived, and then five more. Only two were behind time.

"Come!" they said to her, laughing, "this year either the *Léopoldine* or the *Marie-Jeanne* will *sweep up after the others.*"

And Gaud also began to laugh, livelier and prettier in her joy of waiting for him.

CHAPTER VI.

MEANWHILE the days were passing.

She continued to make her toilet and put on a gay air, and walk down the harbor chatting with the rest. She said that this delay was quite natural. Didn't this same thing happen every year? And then both vessels were seaworthy and they were all such good sailors!

Returning home, in the evening, for the first time she felt the shivers of anxiety and agony pass through her.

Was it really possible that she had begun to feel apprehensive so soon? Could there have been any reason for it?

She was terrified to find that fears had already crept in her mind.

CHAPTER VII.

THE tenth of September! How the days were flying!

One morning, when everything was covered with a chilly fog,—a real autumn morning—the rising sun found her sitting very early under the porch of the chapel for the shipwrecked sailors at the corner, where the widows go to pray, sitting with her eyes fixed, as if iron rings pressed her temples.

Since two days this heavy fog of the early dawn enveloped everything; and that morning she had woke up with much uneasiness because of this impression of winter. What had this day, this hour, and this minute more than so many others that had passed away? Frequently vessels are overdue, for a fortnight, or even a month.

Undoubtedly there was something special that made her come and sit, for the first time, in this

porch of the chapel and read once more the names of the deceased young men.

In memory of
YANN GAOS, lost at sea
in the neighborhood of the Norden Fiord. . . .

. . . . . .

A squall was now heard rising like a shiver from the sea. At the same time something fell on the arched roof, like rain,—dead leaves! They entered the porch, fluttering in the air; the trees of the churchyard were being stripped, shaken by this wind from the sea. Winter was coming!

Lost at sea
in the neighborhood of Norden Fiord,
in the hurricane of the 4th and 5th of August, 1880.

. . . . . .

She read mechanically, and through the arched door her eyes wandered far out over the sea; this morning it was very hazy in the grayish fog and the hanging curtains of clouds were drawn over the distance like a pall.

Once more the squall! and more dead leaves were blown in dancing. A more appalling squall,

as if the west wind, which had scattered so many dead bodies over the sea, wished to disturb even these inscriptions, recalling their names to the living.

Gaud involuntarily gazed upon an empty space on the wall, which seemed to be waiting with a terrible obsession ; she was haunted by the thought of a new tablet which might be necessary to place there very soon, inscribed with some other name, which she did not dare to tell even in her mind in such surroundings.

She was feeling cold, but still remained sitting there on the granite seat, her head thrown back against the stone.

Lost in the neighborhood of the Norden-Fiord,
in the hurricane of the 4th and 5th of August, 1880,
at the age of 23 years. . . .
May he rest in peace !

Now Iceland passed before her eyes with its little lowly cemetery,—far, far away Iceland gleaming now under the midnight sun. . . . And all at once,—her eyes still nailed to that empty space on the wall—she saw with horrible distinctness that new tablet of which she was

thinking a moment before : a fresh tablet, a skull and cross-bones, and in the center, written with a flourish, a name—the adored name, *Yann Gaos!* Then she stood up uttering a shrill cry, like a mad woman.

Outside the fog still hung over the ground ; and the dead leaves continued to dance and flutter in heaps.

Footsteps heard on the path ! Was somebody coming ? Now she stood up quite erect ; in an instant she arranged her cap and composed herself. The steps were approaching ; some one was coming in. She tried to appear that she had just entered there by chance ; she did not want, for all the world, to look like the wife of a shipwrecked seaman.

Why, it was Fante Floury, the wife of the second mate on board the *Léopoldine*. She immediately understood what Gaud was doing there ; no use deceiving her. At first these two women stood there silent, facing each other, apprehensive and displeased for having encountered each other in the same sentiment of horror ; they almost hated each other

"All the men from Tréguier and Saint-Brieuc have arrived since eight days," said Fante at last, pitiless and unsparing, in an irritated voice.

She had brought a wax taper to make a vow.

"Oh, yes!—a vow. . . ." Gaud had never thought of this expedient of desolated hearts. But she followed Fante to the chapel without saying a word, and they both knelt down near each other like two sisters.

They said ardent prayers, with the whole of their souls, to the Virgin, Star of the Sea. Nothing was heard now but the sound of sobbing, and their tears fell thick and fast on the floor.

They rose very peaceful, very confident. Fante helped Gaud, who was tottering, and holding her in her arms, kissed her.

After wiping their tears, and arranging their hair, they brushed off from their petticoats the saltpeter and the dust of the marble floor, and they walked along, each taking a different path, without saying anything more.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE last of September was like another summer, only it was a little gloomy. That year the weather was so lovely, that, but for the dead leaves falling sadly over the roads, one would have imagined it was the gay month of June. Husbands, *fiancés*, and lovers had returned, and everywhere was spread the joy of this second spring of love.

One day, at last, one of the two overdue vessels was signaled to be entering the port. Which one was it?

Some groups of silent and anxious women had collected on the cliff.

Gaud, trembling and pallid, was there by the side of her Yann's father.

"I firmly believe," said the old fisherman, "I firmly believe that it is they! A red railing, a gaff topsail,—it appears much like the one on the

Léopoldine. What do you say, Gaud, my dear daughter?"

"But perhaps not," he added, with a sudden despairing tone; "no, we are again disappointed. The jibboon is not the same, and they have a standing-jib. Well, it's not the one; it's the *Marie-Jeanne.* Oh, certainly, my dear daughter, they will not be much longer in coming."

And day succeeded day, and each night came with inexorable tranquillity, at its usual time.

She continued to dress up for his coming, somewhat out of her head, still afraid of looking like the wife of a shipwrecked sailor, exasperated when people looked at her with an air of commiseration and mystery, turning away her eyes to avoid meeting their glances, which brought chills over her.

Now she was in the habit of going early every morning to the edge of the headland, over the lofty cliffs of Pors-Even, passing behind the paternal house of Yann, so as not to be seen by his mother or little sisters. She went all alone to the farthest point of the Ploubazlanec district, which rises like a deer's horn above the gray

waters of the Manche; and she would sit there all day long, at the foot of an isolated cross, commanding the far-stretching watery expanse.

These granite crosses are seen everywhere, rising over the cliffs of this land of seamen, as if to implore for mercy, as if to appease the infinite relentless, mysterious force, which lures men away, and prefers to keep in its toils the handsomest and the most valiant among them.

Around this crucifix of Pors-Even, the soil is always covered with verdure, carpeted with short furze. On this high ground the sea air is very pure, having scarcely the salty smell of the seaweeds, but filled with the delicious odors of September.

All the promontories of the coast are seen from here, outlined in the far distance, one above the other; the Breton land ended in jagged points, extending along the tranquil haze above the waters.

In the foreground the sea seethed around the rocks, but further out nothing troubled its polished surface. It gave out a little caressing sound, which rose above all the bays. It stretched

far away so calm into immense depths so peaceful! The great blue nothingness, the grave of the Gaoses guarded jealously its impenetrable mystery, while breezes, faint as a breath, carried on their wings the odor of the short broom, blooming a second time in the last rays of the autumn sun.

At certain regular hours the tide fell, and the shallow beach widened everywhere, as if the Manche was ebbing away; then slowly the waters rose again, and thus they continued to fall and rise eternally, caring not a bit for the dead.

And Gaud remained there, sitting at the foot of her crucifix, in the midst of all this calmness, watching, ever watching, until the shadows of night enveloped her, until nothing could be seen.

CHAPTER IX.

SEPTEMBER had come to an end. She hardly could take any food ; sleep had left her eyes.

Now she stayed home crouching, her hands between the knees, leaning her head against the wall. Of what use to rise? Of what use to go to rest? She would throw herself upon her bed without undressing when she was thoroughly exhausted ; or else she would remain there, always sitting and shivering. In this motionless position her teeth chattered from cold ; all the time she felt as if her temples were pressed between iron rings ; her cheeks were drawn ; her mouth was dry, with a feverish taste ; and occasionally she gave out a convulsive hoarse groan, which lasted a long time and during which she beat her head against the stone wall.

Sometimes she called him by his name very tenderly, in a low voice, speaking to him in loving words, as if he were there very near.

Then she would think of something else besides him, of small, insignificant things. Thus she amused herself by watching the shadow of the Virgin in faïence and the holy-water basin, which lengthened gradually over the woodwork of her bed as the sun was getting nearer and nearer to the horizon. And then the return of her anguish would become more horrible, and she would begin to scream again, beating the wall with her head. . . .

And all the hours of the day passed, one after another, and all the hours of the evening, and all the hours of the night, and all the hours of the morning. As she counted the days when he ought to have been back, a wild terror seized upon her. She did not want any more to know either the dates or the names of the days.

There are, usually, some indications of Iceland shipwrecks. Those who return have either witnessed the catastrophe or found some remains of the vessel, a corpse or something else which served them for a clue to guess the rest. But no, nobody had seen anything of the *Léopoldine;* nothing was known about it. The crew of the

Marie-Jeanne had seen it last on the second of August, and they said that it must have gone fishing farther north, and after that everything was an impenetrable mystery.

To wait, always to wait, without knowing anything! When would the moment come when she would wait no longer? She did not know even that, and now she was almost in haste to have it soon.

Oh, if he were dead! At least, let some one have the mercy to tell her so!

Oh, to see him, just as he was, at this very moment—to see him, or at least to know what had befallen him! . . . If only the Virgin, to whom all despairing souls turn in prayer, or some such power, would take pity on her, by a sort of second sight, to show him to her, her Yann—him, living, steering the boat homeward—or else his corpse rolled on the waves, . . . that she might at least be free of all doubts!

Sometimes the image of a sail would come to her in a flash, arising from the edge of the horizon—the *Léopoldine* approaching, hurrying on to put into port! Then she would make an unconscious

movement to rise and run to look out on the sea to see if it were true.

She would fall back again into her seat. Alas! where was at this moment the *Léopoldine?* Where could it possibly be? . . . Yonder, undoubtedly, yonder in far-away Iceland, abandoned, smashed to pieces, and lost!

And this always ended in that ever-recurring vision, always the same: a wreck, broken open and empty, rocked on a silent, murky sea; rocked slowly, slowly, noiselessly, with extreme gentleness—an irony in the midst of the calm expanse of dead waters.

CHAPTER X.

Two o'clock in the morning.

She gave always an attentive ear to every approaching footstep, especially at night. At the least noise, at the slightest unusual sound, her heart beat fast, and her temples began to ache from the constant straining to hear outside things. Two o'clock in the morning. That night, as usual, with clasped hands and eyes open in the darkness, she sat listening to the eternal roaring of the wind that swept over the moor.

Suddenly there came the sound of a footstep, a man hurrying along the road. At such a late hour, who could be passing there? She sat up in her bed, stirred to the depths of her soul, her heart ceasing to beat. . . . Somebody stopped before their door and climbed the little stone steps.

He! Oh, heavenly joy, it was he! Somebody knocked. Could it be anybody else? . . . She

was standing barefooted. Feeble for so many days, she had briskly jumped like a cat, ready to receive the well-beloved in her arms. She was sure that the *Léopoldine* had arrived in the night and had dropped anchor, and he had hastened home.

She arranged all this in her mind quick as the flash of lightning, and now she hurt her fingers in her madness to quickly push back the bolt, which was stuck fast in its place.

. . . . . .

Ah !—and then she fell back slowly, sinking low, her head dropping on her breast. Her beautiful insane dream was at an end. It was only their neighbor Fantec. When she had had time to fully understand that it was only he, that no trace of Yann were to be seen anywhere, she felt herself gradually sink deep in the same gulf of frightful despair.

Poor Fantec excused himself : his wife, as she knew, was very low, and now their child was choking in its cradle, taken with a bad sore throat ; so he had come to ask her help, while he went to get the doctor in Paimpol.

What did all this matter to her? Grown wild through her grief, she could not lend a hand to the suffering. Dropping into a chair, she remained silent before him, with her eyes fixed as a dead man's eyes, no answer coming from her lips; neither listening, nor even looking at him. What did it matter to her these things that this man was telling her?

Then he understood all; he guessed why she had opened the door so quickly, and he was sorely grieved for the wrong he had caused her. He stammered a few words to ask her pardon. It was true that he shouldn't have disturbed—her!

"Me!" answered Gaud spiritedly; "and why not *me*, Fantec?"

Life came back to her at once, for she did not want to appear desperate in the eyes of others; no, certainly not as yet. And then she, in turn, felt sorry for him. She dressed to follow him, and picked up strength to go and take care of his little child.

Returning home at four o'clock, she threw herself on her bed and was soon overcome with sleep, being very tired and exhausted.

But that moment of supreme joy had, in spite of all, left an enduring impression on her mind. She soon awoke with a start and sat up, trying to remember something. She must have had some news about Yann ; amid the confused thoughts coming back to her she searched and searched in her head to find what it was.

"Ah, nothing, alas! No ; it was only Fantec."

And for a second time she fell back into the bottom of the same abyss. No ; in reality there had been no change in her sad and hopeless expectancy.

However, to have felt him there so near was as if something had emanated from him and which had been floating about. It was what they call in Brittany a *presentiment*. She listened more attentively to the footsteps of people passing outside, full of presentiment that some one was to arrive who would give her news about him.

In fact, with daylight Yann's father came in. He took off his cap, pushed back the white curls off his forehead, and took a seat near Gaud's bed.

His heart, too, was in distress ; for his Yann, his handsome Yann, was his eldest, his favorite, the glory of his old age. But, surely, he had not given up all hope ; he was not yet desperate. He began to reassure Gaud in a very tender manner. In the first place, the last arrivals from Iceland all talked about a very thick fog, which might have delayed the vessel ; and then, moreover, an idea had occurred to him that they might have possibly put into port, in the distant Feroë Islands, lying in their route, and whence it takes so long to get letters. Forty years ago this same thing had happened to him when his poor, now defunct mother, had already had a mass said for his soul. The *Léopoldine* was a seaworthy vessel, and the sailors on board were old hands, so why have any doubts about its safety ?

The old Grandma Moan moved about around them, tossing her head ; the distress of her granddaughter had almost restored her energy and power of thinking. She was doing all the housework now, looking from time to time at the faded portrait of her Sylvestre hanging from the

wall. No, since the sea had taken her grandson from her she had lost all faith in the return home of sailors. She only said her prayers to the Holy Virgin through fear, with the tips of her poor lips, having a deadly spite against her in her heart.

But Gaud listened eagerly to these comforting words, gazing with her big eyes at this old man, who resembled so much her dear one. To have him there near her was a protection against death, and she felt reassured and nearer to her Yann. Tears fell silently, while she prayed ardently to the Virgin, Star of the Sea.

Probably they had put in for repairs at one of the islands. She rose, put her hair in order, and arranged her toilet, as if preparing to receive him. Doubtless all was not lost, since his father did not despair yet ; and for a few more days she once more began to watch for his return.

Now it was autumn in earnest, a late autumn, with dismal nightfalls, when everything grew dark in this old hut, as well as all about this old Breton country.

The days seemed only twilight ; gigantic clouds,

moving overhead slowly, darkened, at last, the sky, at midday. The wind moaned and roared continuously like the peals of a church-organ heard from a distance, playing wicked, despairing tunes ; at times it sounded very near against the door, howling like wild beasts.

She had grown now very pale, becoming more and more depressed, as if old age had already touched her with its cold wings. Then, very often she would bring out the belongings of Yann,—his fine wedding clothes, and would unfold and fold them over again, like a demented woman ; especially busying herself with one of his woolen shirts, which had kept the shape of his figure ; when it was gently laid on the table it outlined the curves of his broad shoulders and chest. Finally she put it separate by itself on a shelf in their closet, unwilling to touch it again, that it might preserve for a long time this imprint of his form.

Every evening chilly fogs covered the ground. She would sit at her window and look over this gloomy land, where here and there curls of white smoke were rising from the chimneys of neighbor-

ing huts. Everywhere the fishermen had come back, like migratory birds, turned in by the cold weather. And around their firesides they passed the evenings in merriment, and everywhere in these homes of the Icelanders, old loves were being renewed.

Clinging to the idea that he might have put in to one of these islands, having recovered a sort of hope, she began to expect him, to watch for him again.

CHAPTER XI.

He never came back.

One night in August, off there in the surges of dismal Iceland, in the midst of an appalling uproar, they had celebrated his marriage with the sea.

With the sea, which had formerly nursed him, and rocked him to sleep, which had made him a youth, strong and robust, and which now had reclaimed him in his vigorous manhood for herself; a deep mystery encompassed these monstrous nuptials. All the time dark veils fluttered about; stirring and tossing curtains that had been drawn over to conceal this festival. And the bride filled the air with her din to drown his cries. He, remembering Gaud, his wife of flesh, defended himself in this struggle of giants, against the bride of the grave, up to the moment of his defeat, when, yielding at last, he opened his arms to receive her, with a rattling in his throat, like

a dying bull, his mouth already filled with water, his arms opened, extended and stiffened forever.

. . . . . .

And at this wedding there were present all who had been once invited,—all but Sylvestre, who had gone long ago to sleep in the enchanted gardens, in a far-away nook in the East, on the other side of the earth.

THE END.

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